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At the beginning of the twentieth century, French philosopher, Henri Bergson, unsettled the way people understood time and memory by suggesting that our representation of time as measured and linear is actually a discussion of space. For Bergson, real durational time cannot be quantified or delineated; it must be experienced through intuition. Central to Bergson's philosophy is an emphasis on movement and multiplicity; we exist not as stable entities but as constant, complex processes of becoming. His radical ideas about time, memory, consciousness, and evolution pushed back against a mechanistic and deterministic world-view with a philosophy that not only acknowledged the reality of perpetual change but embraced it—turning threatening chaos into productive creative force. Wildly popular, Bergson's ideas saturated the literary and artistic landscape of what we now regard as modernism, embracing fluidity and change as well as fragmentation.

This dissertation explores the presence of Bergsonian philosophy in the modernist works of W.B. Yeats and Virginia Woolf, investigating how seemingly disparate writers—like Yeats and Woolf—navigate a rapidly changing and fractured world by implementing patterns and creating systems of order. Focusing specifically on each author's use of gyre and wave imagery, my study argues that Yeats and Woolf employ Bergsonian images of multidirectional movement as a way of holding binaries in tension with one another without the need for unity or resolution. Rather than enforcing a dualistic system that chooses between order and disorder, progress and decline, Yeats and

Woolf find a way to artistically circumvent stasis in favor of a Bergsonian model of mobility and multiplicity. Through this approach, each author is able to achieve a remarkable fluidity of scope, allowing them to move from the external to the internal, the objective to the subjective, and the personal to the national in a way that productively blurs delineations and constructively complicates dualities.

This dissertation challenges the scholarly tendency to see Yeats and Woolf as antithetical representations of a monolithic modernism, where Yeats embodies tradition and structure and Woolf exemplifies experimentation and flux. By exploring the movement and fluidity in Yeats's structured system from *A Vision* and the order and pattern in Woolf's experimental novel *The Waves*, I bring these authors into a new dialectic. After the introduction, the first two chapters of this dissertation break new ground by utilizing unpublished archival materials from Yeats's personal library to explore the previously undiscussed influence of Bergsonian theory on the poet's later works. After establishing this relationship between Yeats and Bergson, the last two chapters then discuss the unexpected similarities between Yeats's mystical system in *A Vision* and Woolf's novel *The Waves*. Through this focused comparative study, I contend that both authors, through their repeated use of gyres and waves, find a way to embrace Bergsonian fluidity and change while calling attention to the comforting artifice of perceived order; they concretize a pattern, but it is one that is cleverly and ironically generative rather than conclusive.

GYRES AND WAVES: BERGSONIAN MOVEMENT AND MULTIPLICITY IN THE WORKS OF W. B. YEATS AND VIRGINIA WOOLF

by

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To Drew and my family, whose love and support made
the completion of this project possible.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation written by Meghan H. McGuire has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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INTRODUCTION

> The mind is full of monstrous, hybrid, unmanageable emotions. That the age of the earth is 3,000,000,000 years; that human life lasts but a second; that the capacity of the human mind is nevertheless boundless; that life is infinitely beautiful yet repulsive; that one's fellow creatures are adorable but disgusting; that science and religion have between them destroyed belief; that all bonds of union seem broken, yet some control must exist […].
>
> —Virginia Woolf, "Poetry, Fiction and the Future" (429).

In Virginia Woolf's 1927 essay "Poetry, Fiction and the Future," she calls for the radical blurring of generic boundaries, where prose writing possesses all the best qualities of poetry and drama. As a novelist, Woolf's primary concern is with the future of fiction, but she is also astutely aware that regardless of genre, the literature of the future cannot be like the literature of the past because an individual's understanding and experience of the world is no longer holistic. Cultural shifts, global conflicts, and the discovery of new knowledge ruptured the way people understood and experienced time, and Woolf describes her current era as "an age clearly when we are not fast anchored where we are; things are moving round us; we are moving ourselves" (429). For Woolf, and many others like her, the modern world, and their knowledge of it, was moving and changing at such an alarming pace that the "[f]eelings which used to come simple and separate do so no longer [….] Emotions which used to enter the mind whole are now broken up on the threshold" ("Poetry, Fiction" 433). This dissertation interrogates that rupture and investigates how modernist writers, specifically W.B. Yeats and Virginia Woolf, navigate

that rapidly changing and fractured world-view by implementing patterns and creating systems of order.

Since a discussion of the representation and experience of time is at the heart of this study, the influential theories of early twentieth-century French philosopher, Henri Bergson, are foundational to this enquiry. Bergson's emphasis on intuition rather than analysis coupled with his radical assertion that we inadvertently spatialize time when we refer to it as linear or measurable, and that real time—or *durée*—is something that can only be experienced not quantified, blurred commonly held perceptions and opened up new avenues for artistic interpretations of personal, historical, and imagined time. His understanding of "time as force" also worked to unsettle what he believed was a "static conception of time" which served only as a "defense against the heterogeneity of the real" (Guerlac 2). Central to Bergson's philosophy is also an emphasis on movement and multiplicity; we exist not as stable entities but as constant, complex processes of becoming. His ideas pushed back against a mechanistic and deterministic world-view with a philosophy that not only acknowledged the reality of perpetual change but embraced it—turning threatening chaos into productive creative force.

An additional feature of Bergsonian thought is its ability or "attempt to mediate between the extremes of two opposing positions," to "establish a middle ground in which the two theories can live in a somewhat hostile, uncomfortable truce" (Gillies, *Henri* 13). It is this Bergsonian emphasis on dialectic tension rather than definitive resolution that I contend connects the experimental modernist works of W.B. Yeats and Virginia Woolf. Focusing primarily on Yeats's esoteric multi-genre text, *A Vision*, and Virginia Woolf's

avant-garde novel, *The Waves*, I contend that these seemingly disparate authors similarly employ Bergsonian images of movement to hold binaries in tension with one another without the need for unity or resolve. Both authors, through their repeated use of waves and gyres, find a way to embrace fluidity and change while calling attention to the comforting artifice of perceived order; they concretize a pattern, but it is one that cleverly and ironically circumvents stasis and fixity.

The images and examples that Bergson turns to in order to articulate his philosophies of time and durée are particularly important to this argument because they share characteristics found in the waves and gyres of Woolf and Yeats. Even though Bergson suggests that there is problematically "no image [that] can represent duration as both continuous with itself and differing from itself," he chooses "to contain the problem in a paradoxical—for him perhaps oxymoronic—formulation" (Harris 111). As Paul Harris points out in his fascinating interdisciplinary article "Diagramming Duration: Bergsonian Multiplicity and Chaos Theory," Bergson's images for explaining duration frequently involve examples of "double movement" (Harris 112). Harris productively uses chaos theory to visually map Bergsonian ideas of time, since chaos theory utilizes systems that are a "combination of local unpredictability and some form of global order" and represents these systems through graphic mathematical diagrams (Harris 100). Bergson attempts on numerous occasions to find an image or set of images that can accurately represent, and help explain, the complexities of durational experience, but each metaphor and image falls short. In *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, for example, he

compares duration to a ball of thread, the color spectrum, and an elastic band, postulating that "Inner life is both the unrolling and the rolling up of a coil. And, it is neither" (qtd. in Douglass 121).

Each of these images represents some aspect of duration, but Bergson admits that each representation is also flawed. Examining Bergson's failed metaphor of a "ball of thread" as a representation of durée, Harris concludes that "he literally wants it both ways: he needs the thread unwinding off the coil to figure human finitude, and the ball winding up, growing bigger, as the thread of the present accumulates more and more memory" (104). Harris argues that Bergson's ideal metaphor for duration exists in the chaos diagram of a Lorentz attractor, an image of "two disk-like configurations … intertwined by trajectories that cross over from one to the other" (104)—an image that remarkably resembles Yeats's interlocking gyres and the movement of Woolf's waves. What Harris's chaos model reveals is that Bergson's understanding of duration and qualitative multiplicity is best represented through images of interpenetrating movement—simultaneous shifting inward and outward with no fixed point of origin or conclusion.

Yeats and Woolf's images of the gyre and the wave both seem to accomplish this multidirectional movement. The wave rises and falls and crashes and recedes without stasis; it is composed of countless individual droplets of water, yet it acts as a unified force. It is paradoxically homogenous and heterogeneous at the same time and exists in a constant state of change and perpetual movement. Similarly, the gyre or whirlpool suggests movement and force swirling around a seemingly stable center, but the unique

image of the Yeatsian interlocking double gyre—an image that I contend is present in *The Waves* as well—depicts a swirling force moving inward towards a center at the same time that another gyre is moving out and expanding. The stable center becomes an illusion, and there is both oscillation and pulsation—simultaneous contraction and dilation that echoes the movement of the waves.

Although these images are still inherently flawed representations of Bergsonian *durée*, they are closer than most because they embody process rather than product; they depict a qualitative multiplicity that is heterogeneous and yet unified. They tap into the compositional rhythm that Bergson values in *Time and Free Will*, where he notes,

> The poet is he with whom feelings develop into images, and the images themselves into words which translate them while obeying the laws of rhythm. In seeing these images pass before our eyes we in turn experience the feeling which was, so to speak, their emotional equivalent. (15)

Through these complex images and patterns, I maintain that Yeats and Woolf are able to artistically express the "emotional equivalent" of durational experience without reducing that experience to a choice between order and disorder, progress or decline. This vacillating, vortical movement also allows each author a remarkable fluidity of scope; they can move from the personal to the national, or the subjective to the objective, in a way that productively blurs delineations and constructively complicates dualities.

Navigating Change

In order to understand the significance of what Yeats and Woolf achieve through their imagery, it is necessary first to contextualize the circumstances that created its

necessity. Returning to the epigraph of this introductory chapter, we can see Woolf, in her 1927 essay "Poetry, Fiction and the Future," encapsulating many of the dramatic shifts in thought and subsequent anxieties of the first three decades of the twentieth century:

> The mind is full of monstrous, hybrid, unmanageable emotions. That the age of the earth is 3,000,000,000 years; that human life lasts but a second; that the capacity of the human mind is nevertheless boundless; that life is infinitely beautiful yet repulsive; that one's fellow creatures are adorable but disgusting; that science and religion have between them destroyed belief; that all bonds of union seem broken, yet some control must exist […]. (429)

Woolf's statement is important and revealing because it highlights a number of key features found throughout modernist literature, and it gestures towards the cultural and historical factors that influenced them.

First, it reveals an obsession, and new orientation, with time and our place in the universe. Reconciling the brevity of human life and experience with the scientifically proven vastness of the earth's age was still a relatively new dilemma in the 1920s. An awareness of fossils had existed for centuries but dedication to their scientific study and its relationship to the Earth's age did not gain momentum until the late eighteenth century. Debates between Plutonism and Neptunism dominated the early nineteenth century, unsettling commonly held beliefs about the origin and age of the Earth and expanding existing fissures between scientific and religious communities.[1] Darwin's

[1] In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, scientists explained the presence of fossils and unrecognizable species as the result of a series of cataclysmic natural disasters. Generally speaking, Plutonists attributed these shifts to volcanic activity, while the Neptunists argued that these disasters were due to periodic floods or a retreating ocean. For a more detailed and nuanced understanding of this critical scientific debate, see Chapter 4 in Michael Leddra's *Time Matters: Geology's Legacy to Scientific Thought.*

publication of *Origin of the Species* in 1859 further complicated this divide between religion and science—echoed in Woolf's statement—and shifted the way individuals understood themselves and their relationship to the natural world.

In Henri Bergson's 1907 publication *Creative Evolution*, however, he accepts Darwinian Theory but argues that evolution is "neither mechanistic nor teleological"; it is instead "a contingent process of growth and change, […] a positive movement of perpetual differentiation that invents new forms" (Guerlac 7). Through this theory, Bergson effectively obscures the boundaries between science and metaphysics and embraces the power of change and the view of time as force.

As Woolf's observations imply, there is also an emotional and psychological bifurcation that occurs in the early twentieth century, contributing to "the strange way in which things that have no apparent connection are associated in [the] mind" ("Poetry, Fiction" 433). This fractured, disconnected perspective has become a token feature attributed to modernist literature, with critics often trying to pinpoint the exact moment of disjunction. In her 1924 essay "Character in Fiction" Woolf famously cites its origins by asserting "that on or about December 1910, human character changed" (421). Numerous critics point to WWI as the defining moment of rupture, where violence and loss were felt on a global scale. Identifying an exact moment of change is problematic, however, especially from a Bergsonian perspective, because it implies a sudden shift rather than a continuous process. Using WWI as a cultural marker, for example, disregards seminal moments prior to 1914, like Roger Fry's post-impressionist exhibit in 1910 and the

Armory Show of 1913. Wars become obvious indicators of social and cultural upheaval, but the partition that WWI magnified existed long before the first shots were ever fired.

Decades before Eliot's "heap of broken images," the novelists of the *fin de siècle,* for example, presented stories and characters that struggled with a divided or dualistic sense of self—of which Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and H.G. Well's *Time Machine* are only a few. Later writers like D.H. Lawrence and James Joyce explored similar issues before the war, while artists like Stravinsky and Nijinsky reimagined the parameters and conventions of music and dance, emphasizing dissonance and discord rather than melody and grace.

The impact of war and violence on the modernist world view, however, is not something that can be disregarded entirely. The physical and emotional scars of war are often in the foreground of Virginia Woolf's work, like the characters of Septimus Smith and Percival, but they also linger on the edges. For an Irish writer like W.B. Yeats, the devastation of WWI was secondary to the more immediate violence of the 1916 Easter Rising, the Irish War for Independence, and the subsequent Civil War, creating an atmosphere of perpetual conflict for over a decade. For both Woolf and Yeats, their world was a place of increasing instability, where "all bonds of union seem broken, yet some control must exist" (Woolf, "Poetry, Fiction" 429).

Why Yeats and Woolf?

It is this tension between instability and control which draws me to these two preeminent modernist authors, although they are rarely discussed in the same critical conversations. Since scholarship on early twentieth-century literature still tends to

privilege the more structurally and stylistically experimental work of the high modernists—authors like Eliot, Joyce, Pound, and Woolf—and many modernist critics still associate Yeats's work primarily with the earlier Symbolist movement, Virginia Woolf and W.B. Yeats are typically regarded as disparate and incompatible. Texts like Yeats's *A Vision* and Woolf's *The Waves* are rarely discussed together, especially since each text initially appears antithetical to the other. *A Vision*, on the surface, is a text dedicated to systematic order, spatializing and delineating time in a way that appears to reject Bergsonian flux and fluidity. *The Waves*, on the other hand, appears to give in to, and even embrace, that flux, breaking with the conventions of narrative form and privileging interiority. In this dissertation, however, I complicate these typically held assertions and claim that these two texts are actually surprisingly similar. By placing these two authors in conversation with one another and linking them through the philosophies of Henri Bergson, I expose a more nuanced view of each text—highlighting the movement and fluidity that undergirds *A Vision* and the pattern and order present in *The Waves*.

Methodologically, I adopt process philosophy and a Bergsonian lens for my critical approach. Rather than focusing exclusively on the final product of a poem or a novel, I am interested in its process of creation, in seeing the author thinking through his or her own work and making choices about composition and revision. To this end, I rely heavily in this study on primary sources and archival material: letters, essays, diary entries, manuscripts of drafts, and even personal annotations in texts. My argument is a thematic analysis in that it explores the use of waves and gyres, but it does not simply

trace or chart their occurrence in each text. Instead, it shows how these images permeate the entirety of a text—structurally, thematically, and stylistically—so that even the rhythm of the syntax mimics the oscillating movement that these images imply.

In this project, I am less interested in resolution than in dialectic—in the tension between pattern and flux and the way in which dualities can coexist without resolution. This Bergsonian approach, a third way of viewing, informs the structure and scope of this project. In choosing to limit the parameters of my argument to a discussion of W.B. Yeats and Virginia Woolf, I have created a dualistic macrocosm of my argument. As I closely investigate each author's use of imagery that inhabits dualities without stasis, I am also consciously placing a male writer in conversation with a female writer, a poet with a novelist, an Irishman with an Englishwoman. In this way, my dissertation, like Bergsonian theory, is predicated on dualities but is interested in how these boundaries overlap and break down. In my argument, I am not attempting to resituate these writers or their works into new stable categories; instead, I am placing them in conversation with one another in order to expand the way we think about each one, and possibly the way we think about modernism as well.

Why Bergson?

Although the pairing of Yeats and Woolf is unconventional on its own, the addition of Henri Bergson to this critical inquiry is perhaps even more perplexing for readers. Bergson is frequently discussed in relation to Woolf and stream-of-consciousness narration, but he is never associated with Yeats, so my decision to draw these two disparate authors together through Bergsonian theory may at first seem rather

unusual. In order to make sense of this choice, however, it is important to understand first the magnitude of Bergson's influence on culture and art in the first few decades of the twentieth century, as well as the evolution of Bergsonian scholarship in relation to studies of modernism.

In January of 1913, on his first trip to the United States, French philosopher Henri Bergson unintentionally caused one of the first traffic jams in New York City. Publicized ahead of time by the *New York Times*, his lecture on "Spirituality and Liberty," delivered in French at Columbia University, drew academics and educated socialites alike and crowded the already bustling city streets. What Mary Ann Gillies describes as Bergson's "almost cultlike popularity" occurred due to a variety of factors, including his "straightforward, jargon-free speaking style" and the perception that he was a "champion of the spirit in a world where the spirit was sacrificed to the perpetual pursuit of material success and progress" (Gillies, *Henri* 25). Despite his humble and private personality, Bergson became one of the most public, well-known philosophers and academics in the first two decades of the twentieth century and a major influence on a variety of artistic and cultural modernisms that emerged during this turbulent but innovative period.

Since Gilles Deleuze revived Bergsonian theory in his 1966 monograph *Bergsonism,* scholarship on Bergson has been relatively slow but steady. The late 1980s and 1990s produced a number of seminal texts on his work from a variety of academic disciplines, including A.R. Lacey's *Bergson* and Mary Ann Gillies's *Henri Bergson and British Modernism*. In the 2000s, both John Mullarkey's *Bergson and Philosophy* and

Suzanne Guerlac's *Thinking in Time* provided valuable introductions to the philosopher's key texts and beliefs, and in the past few years, a renewed interest in Bergsonian studies has sparked a number of important scholarly endeavors. The 2013 critical anthology *Understanding Bergson, Understanding Modernism*, edited by Paul Ardoin, S.E. Gontarski, and Laci Mattison, for example, is a welcome extension of Gillies's work on Bergson's influence on literary and cultural modernism, providing accessible introductory material on Bergson's key theories and texts as well as more focused discussions of Bergson's impact on specific artists and movements.

Also, in the past few years, early works on Bergson have been revived and reprinted, including J. Alexander Gunn's 1920 text *Bergson and His Philosophy*, which is an attempt, in Gunn's words, to be a "practical" and "useful" guide "to the general reader and to the student of philosophy" alike (1). In 2015, Duke University Press reprinted Vladimir Jankélévitch's early biography *Henri Bergson*, newly translated by Nils F. Schott and including a contextualizing introduction by prominent Bergson scholar, Alexandre Lefebvre.[2] Jankélévitch was Bergson's friend and protégé, and since Bergson was a very private man and all of his manuscripts, notes, and lectures were destroyed at his request after his death, Jankélévitch's critical biography and commentary becomes an essential point of access for understanding Bergson's life and works. It also provides, as Lefebvre contends, a much needed perspective on Bergson that is markedly different from Gilles Deleuze's dominant view. According to Lefebvre, Deleuze's highly

[2] Jankélévitch's biography *Henri Bergson* was originally published in 1930. It was revised and expanded in 1959 with three additional chapters that address Bergson's later work, and this volume, edited by Lefebvre and Schott, is a translation of the complete 1959 edition.

influential reading of Bergson "underplays the psychological, spiritual, and existential aspects of Bergson's thought," something that Jankélévitch's portrayal privileges (xvii). Additionally, Lefebvre asserts, and I agree, that Jankélévitch's study of Bergson productively implements a Bergsonian process of discourse and discovery that is counter to Deleuze's more "systematic, tightly presented" and "no-nonsense" interpretation (xvi-xvii). Jankélévitch also presents Bergson "as a philosopher of existence," who is interested not just in "theoretical discourse" but in how those theories can be embraced and utilized to make life better (xvi).

In addition to these summative monographs and important reprintings, more focused studies regarding Bergson are also beginning to emerge. Jimena Canales's recent book, *The Physicist & The Philosopher: Einstein, Bergson, and the Debate that Changed Our Understanding of Time*, for example, provides a detailed look at a key encounter between Henri Bergson and Albert Einstein in April of 1922—a seemingly innocuous event that Canales argues had substantial ramifications for both men's careers as well as the fields of science and philosophy. Despite this recent revival of Bergsonian studies, however, his influence and impact on the works of W.B. Yeats is still surprisingly neglected. This dissertation, therefore, seeks to add Yeats to this evolving critical discussion of Bergson and modernism, and uses archival materials from Yeats's personal library to prove that the poet was not only aware of the philosopher's theories, but actively engaged with these theories in his work.

A Double Movement in Modernism

Although this project focuses specifically on the similarities of Bergsonian movement in gyres and waves within Yeats and Woolf's work, and the tensions that that movement conveys, this undulation and vacillation is not limited to their work alone. In fact, there is a pervasiveness of contracting and dilating movement, which is not limited to these particular images, present throughout much of modernist literature. In T.S. Eliot's work, for example, there is a similar fluctuating, dualistic movement, but it tends to focus on ascent and descent. The tension between this upward and downward mobility is present at various points throughout *The Waste Land* (1922), beginning in the opening section, "The Burial of the Dead," with the "dried tubers" under the ground, anticipating spring growth. However, rather than the familiar vernal imagery of birth and life, Eliot provides the unexpected phrase, "Winter kept us warm," suggesting a safety in the "forgetful snow," especially when compared with the opening statement, "April is the cruelest month" (37). Immediately following this section there is a freedom in descent when the speaker and Marie go sledding down the mountain, but this exhilaration is undercut by the inclusion of the "drowned Phoenician Sailor" (37-38). Later, in "Death By Water," the language of waves and gyres curiously appears mixed with Eliot's use of descent:

> A current under sea
> Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell
> He passed the stages of his age and youth
> Entering the whirlpool. (46)

Although the presence of this fluctuating movement functions differently in Eliot's work, there is still a tension between contraries, with perhaps a tendency more towards decline.

Other modernist works also incorporate a similar movement. In Ezra Pound's poetry and prose, there is, of course, an attraction to the image of the vortex, where "image" is no longer an idea but "a radiant node or cluster […] from which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing" ("Vorticism" 289).[3] The vortex for Pound is about a dynamic energy and a creative force, but there is also a more subtle movement of undulation present in Pound's work, which appears in poems like "Exile's Letter." In this beautiful translation of a Rihaku poem, this contracting and dilating movement is captured in the repeated coming together and separation of the speaker and his friend. Throughout the poem, the speaker tells the reader of the many times that he and his friend, So-Kin of Rakuyo, came together and were separated over the years, with much of the language and imagery evoking wave and gyre-like movement. For example, when the speaker describes their journey together in Sen-Go, he explains that they travelled "[t]hrough all the thirty-six folds of the turning and twisting waters," and after another departure, the road back to his friend is described as "twisted like sheep's guts" (66). Their final parting similarly echoes the spiraling movement of the gyre in its beautiful and evocative imagery: "It is like the flowers falling at Spring's end/ Confused, whirled in a tangle" (67).

While the coming and going of the friends creates a wave-like rhythm and structure for the poem, there is also a widening in moments of contraction. For example,

[3] For a comparative discussion of Pound's vortex and Yeats's gyre, see Colin McDowell and Timothy Materer's article "Gyre and Vortex: W.B. Yeats and Ezra Pound."

when the two companions come together there is an openness in their friendship that the speaker captures when he says, “And we all spoke out our hearts and minds, and without regret” (65). This is seen once again later in the poem when the companions come together in celebration with drink and music—“Pleasure lasting, with courtezans, going and coming without hindrance” (67). This vacillating movement is subtle in the poem, but certainly present, and it serves as just one example of many in Pound’s oeuvre.

This oscillating movement is also seen in Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis* through Gregor Samsa’s struggle between action and inaction and the physical separation he experiences through his isolation from the family. This is perhaps most clear when Gregor attempts to emerge from his room —lured into the social world of the living room by his sister’s violin music, “that unknown nourishment he craved,” before being forced to retreat into his personal room of isolation and immobility (101). As the situation continues, the family also becomes more and more constricted, confined to the apartment and unable to move because of Gregor’s condition. This compression, however, is alleviated after Gregor’s death when the charwoman curtly and symbolically “shut[s] the door and open[s] the window wide” (112). The entire family then leaves the apartment and takes a train “all the way to the open countryside at the edge of town” (117). No longer confined to the apartment, the family, and the setting of the novella, opens and expands. This movement of expansion after restriction is also punctuated by the final image in the story: the young Grete stretching her body and “blossom[ing] into a beautiful, voluptuous girl” (118). Once again, the movement of contraction and dilation dominates, and Kafka’s world, like Eliot and Pound’s, is not simple, resolved, or static.

This undulating movement of contraction and dilation most resembles Yeats and Woolf's waves and gyres in a poem like Mina Loy's "Parturition," where the movement is literalized through the act and description of giving birth. In this brilliant and often neglected modernist poem, the speaker describes the painful and euphoric experience of childbirth from the perspective of the mother in labor. Like much of Woolf and Yeats's work, the movement is essential to the poem's structure, style, and theme. Always attentive to the spatializing materiality of language on the written page, Loy uses blank spaces and long dashes to mimic the physical contractions of the woman in labor, and the entire poem emits a surging urgency with enjambed lines and only two periods:

> The business of the bland sun
> Has no affair with me
> In my congested cosmos of agony
> From which there is no escape
> On infinitely prolonged nerve-vibrations
> Or in contraction
> To the pin-point nucleus of being
>
> Locate an irritation without
> It is within
> Within (4)

As the mother experiences the physical effects of contraction and dilation, she also conveys to the reader the personal and universal scope of the experience. Beginning the scientifically titled poem with the powerful declaration

> I am the centre
> Of a circle of pain
> Exceeding its boundaries in every direction (4)

the laboring woman calls the reader's attention to the very real and personal experience of childbirth. Her pain and fear and exhilaration are all present in the diction and rhythm of the poem, but the action of the poem is not isolated to these personal experiences. Instead, it expands its scope, and the mother connects her experience to that of other women—to a universal experience of motherhood that transcends time:

> Mother I am
> Identical
> With infinite Maternity
> Indivisible
> Acutely
> I am absorbed
> Into
> The was-is-ever-shall-be
> Of cosmic reproductivity (7)

This undulant shift from the personal to the universal, the subjective to the objective, is similar to the shift that occurs in Yeats's *A Vision* and Woolf's *The Waves*. In this poem, however, the movement is not located in a particular image like the gyre or the wave, but is instead conveyed through the physical contraction and dilation of the female body.

As these examples suggest, this dualistic, fluctuating movement is present in a number of modernist texts and deserves further scholarly attention, but my project focuses specifically on the works of W.B. Yeats and Virginia Woolf because they concretize this movement in a particular, consistent image. For both authors, the specific image is essential because it unites order with fluidity while remaining dynamic and continuous.

An Outline of Chapters

My first chapter breaks new ground by exploring the undiscussed relationship between W.B. Yeats and Henri Bergson. While these two prominent figures in modernism are typically viewed at best as indifferent to one another and at worst as incompatible, I trace multiple commonalities between them, first exploring a shared personal and philosophical background before using archival materials from Yeats's personal library to uncover the poet's careful study of Bergsonian theory. Looking closely at Yeats's annotations and marginalia in his personal copies of Bergson's *Creative Evolution* and *Matter and Memory*, I discern patterns in Yeats's reading of these two texts that suggests Bergson's work impacted the poet's revised version of *A Vision* and the two volumes of poetry that immediately followed its initial publication in 1925, collections which are based on Yeats's complex system from *A Vision*.

My second chapter extends the arguments and archival work of the first chapter to discuss these two volumes of Yeats's later poetry—*The Tower* (1928) and *The Winding Stair* (1933). I approach these volumes of poetry as poetic enactments of Yeats's Antithetical and Primary gyres, with *The Tower* serving as the masculine, creative, and chaotic antithetical, and *The Winding Stair* representing the feminine, reasonable, and ordered primary. Analyzing each volume separately, but looking at them as an essential pair, I argue that Yeats's engagement with Bergsonian theory is not limited to *A Vision* but is evident in his later poetry as well. Select poems from each volume are discussed, with the poems from *The Tower* originating from a list of titles handwritten in the back cover of Yeats's copy of Bergson's *Matter and Memory*. For this volume, my argument

focuses on Yeats's depictions of time and his resistance to Bergsonian fluidity. In my discussion of *The Winding Stair*, I extend this argument but contend that Yeats's poetry also suggests an openness to fluidity and a potential sublime excitement in chaos. In both volumes, Yeats maintains a tension between structure and flux, placing his poetry in direct conversation with the theories of Henri Bergson.

Following a discussion of Yeats's work and its relationship to Bergsonian philosophy, my third chapter explores Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* (1931) and its unexpected similarities with Yeats's style and structure in *A Vision.* Regarded by numerous critics as a Bergsonian text,[4] *The Waves* is frequently lauded for its experimental form and emphasis on fluidity and multiplicity. My argument accepts these previous comparisons with Bergson's work but specifically focuses on the tension created between fluidity and order through the dynamic image of the wave and its multidirectional movement. I analyze the structural, thematic, and stylistic presence of waves in Woolf's text in order to draw comparisons to Yeats's interpenetrating gyres in *A Vision*. This unexpected comparison is grounded not only in a close reading of the two texts but in a composite of Woolf's views of Yeats in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Utilizing a mix of diary entries, letters, essays, and critical reviews, I demonstrate that while Woolf is drafting and revising *The Waves,* she is attracted to Yeats's recent work—particularly his poems from *The Tower*. I also contend that while Woolf's experimental

[4] Early critics of Woolf and *The Waves* immediately noticed the similarities between her work and Bergsonian theory. Ruth Gruber's 1935 book, *Virginia Woolf: A Study,* is only one of many early examples. More recently, Mary Ann Gillies unequivocally declares, in her chapter on Woolf included in *Henri Bergson and British Modernism*, that "*The Waves* is a Bergsonian work" (126).

novel is dedicated to change and fluidity, it also demonstrates her attentiveness to pattern and order.

In my final chapter, I interrogate the relationship between Woolf's *The Waves* and Yeats's *A Vision* more closely, focusing explicitly on the presence and function of Yeatsian gyres in Woolf's experimental novel. I compare the contracting and dilating movement of the gyre to the function and movement of the waves to contend that both authors implement structural and stylistic patterns that cleverly circumvent stasis, coming close to representing Bergson's unrepresentable *durée*. My argument challenges scholarship that regards Percival as the unifying force in the novel by postulating that this absent character is actually the false center of a Yeatsian gyre. Although Woolf uses Percival to bring her six characters together, the sense of order that he provides is illusory. Percival is central to the novel, but he is not a figure of stability. Instead, he ironically embodies fragmentation and fluidity. He is a composite of other people's perceptions and his absence in the novel underscores the unattainability of stasis.

After a close analysis of Woolf and Yeats's overlapping, permeating ideas and anxieties regarding time, fluidity, and order, my dissertation concludes with a brief consideration of how each author's contextual circumstances may have impacted their openness or resistance to Bergsonian theory.

Although the scope of this project is quite narrow, I think the broader arguments that it envelopes—about time and change and how we engage with fluidity—are particularly relevant today, and continue to be relevant, as personal, national, and political categories and boundaries shift and break down. In historical and cultural

moments of extreme change and turmoil, there is always a push against the tide, a desperate and sometimes fearful need to categorize and delineate. Human intellect works perpetually to label and contain things because there is something profoundly comforting about arrangement and classification. As Bergson's early biographer, J. Alexander Gunn notes, "Our intellect loves the solid and the static, but life itself is not static—it is dynamic" (Gunn 24). In general, this need to order and contain is simply part of the way we make sense of the world around us and our experience of it. For the most part, it is relatively innocuous. When taken to extremes, however, it can become a devastating means for justifying oppression and inequality.

The political and cultural climate today echoes the late 1920s and early 1930s world of Yeats and Woolf in fascinating and startling ways, and I think these authors' approach provides interesting models for how artists struggle with the need to order and delineate in the face of threatening fluidity. Bergson's once radical belief in a world of perpetual change and movement is now accepted by quantum physicists as a scientific reality, but, of course, we continue to seek order and locate patterns in the face of this reality. By turning to a Bergsonian study of W.B. Yeats and Virginia Woolf's struggle with this exact dilemma, we are able to recognize that the stability and security of order does not have to come through fixity or stasis.

CHAPTER II

W.B. YEATS'S UNEXPECTED BERGSONIAN VISION

Ever since Gilles Deleuze initiated the revival of Bergsonian studies in his 1966 monograph *Bergsonism* and Mary Ann Gillies published her essential monograph *Henri Bergson and British Modernism* in 1996, modernist discourse has ubiquitously accepted Henri Bergson as a monumental influence in the formation and evolution of this complex early twentieth-century literary and artistic movement. Regarded as a key figure in modernist studies, Bergson is frequently discussed in connection with major modernist writers like Eliot, Pound, Joyce, Woolf, and even the later Beckett. Suzanne Guerlac notes that because Bergson did not have a large group of graduate students or formal protégés, his "open and nonsystematic" philosophies and principles were "easily borrowed piecemeal and altered by enthusiastic admirers," influencing a variety of movements with differing ideologies from cubism to anarchism (10). Numerous journal articles as well as monographs are dedicated to the study of his influence on American and British high-modernism, and Bergson's aesthetic philosophy, especially since Shiv Kumar's analysis in the 1960s, has been closely linked to the avant-garde narrative style of stream-of-consciousness.[5] And although a few scholars, like Daniel Albright and Calvin Bedient,[6] briefly discuss the indirect relationship between W.B. Yeats and Henri

[5] See Shiv Kumar's *Bergson and the Stream of Consciousness Novel* for an excellent early analysis of the relationship between Bergson's ideas and stream of consciousness narration.
[6] See Daniel Albright's *Quantum Poetics: Yeats, Pound, Eliot, and the Science of Modernism* as well as Calvin Bedient's *The Yeats Brothers and Modernism's Love of Motion*.

Bergson, a comprehensive study of the two remains absent from both Modernist and Yeatsian scholarship.

My intention in this chapter is to first explore the potential reasons for this absence, to then offer evidence of direct and indirect connections between Bergson and Yeats—including Yeats's clear awareness and study of Bergsonian philosophy—and ultimately to suggest that Yeats's revised 1937 version of *A Vision* reflects a number of Bergsonian ideas, which draws his work into existing conversations about Bergson and modernism by focusing on representations of time, memory, the self, and consciousness. Like Mary Ann Gillies, I tend to see influence not from the theoretical perspective of a zeitgeist but as something that cannot be divorced from its social and cultural context (Gillies, *Henri* 4). The ideas of Henri Bergson saturated academic, artistic, and philosophical discourse during the first two decades of the twentieth century, and Yeats was a key figure in these circles. Even if he remained less vocal about his stance towards Bergson, it is important to understand how Yeats's work engages with, and at times rejects and challenges, Bergsonian philosophy.

Despite Yeats's meticulous systemization of a seemingly deterministic world view, I contend that *A Vision* is a linguistic experiment in conceptualizing the modern flux of time and consciousness. It spatializes and delineates time in order to create a system that Yeats knows is ultimately flawed, but one that provides him with stability and creative force in the face of unpredictable fluidity and change. Specifically through the symbolic image of interlocking gyres, Yeats is able to create a system that allows dualities to exist without the need for resolution or stasis. It is a system undergirded by

dynamic movement and perpetual change, and one that echoes Bergson's belief that evolution "is not something that happens to life […] it is life itself, a perpetual movement of differentiation" (Guerlac 7). Although not all aspects of Yeats's philosophy in *A Vision* neatly align with all of Bergson's theories, this chapter illustrates how Yeats's work is part of a larger modernist discourse about time and consciousness—a Yeatsian discourse which can no longer ignore the voice of Bergson.

I view this project, in many ways, as an extension of Mary Ann Gillies's earlier work in *Henri Bergson and British Modernism*. Just as her research became a necessary extension of Paul Douglass and Tom Quirk's work with Bergson and the American modernists,[7] this chapter seeks to expand the scope of Gillies analysis past the usual roster of key modernist writers to include the works of W.B. Yeats—a major twentieth-century writer who still remains uncomfortably on the periphery of a great deal of modernist discourse. This is not to say that labeling Yeats a modernist is new or monumental. In fact, most scholars would include Yeats's later works under the blanket of "Modernism," but since Yeats's career spanned so many decades and included decades that preceded the years we think of as high-modernism, this seminal author is still frequently, and surprisingly, left out of the conversation or mentioned only in passing—seen as an eccentric outlier who dabbled with modernism late in life but really belonged to a different era. In *Henri Bergson and British Modernism*, for example, Gillies only mentions W.B. Yeats once in her entire book and that is only as a non-Bergsonian influence for T.E. Hulme. In a single sentence, Yeats is cast aside with the "poets of the

[7] See Paul Douglass's *Bergson, Eliot, & American Literature* (1986) and Tom Quirk's *Bergson and American Culture* (1990).

1890s" and the "French Symbolists," flippantly identified as a poet of a previous generation and one who is, therefore, inherently anti-modernist and anti-Bergsonian (42). Although Gillies acknowledges in her introduction the natural limitations of her argument's scope, noting that she has been intentionally selective and has chosen to focus only on "those writers who make a major contribution to defining Modernism and who best show signs of Bergsonian influences" (6), her complete erasure of Yeats's role and participation in the movement demands reassessment. Gillies certainly broke new ground in her analysis of Eliot, Woolf, Joyce, Richardson, and Conrad, but what is interesting, and problematic, is how the scholarship on Bergson and British Modernism has maintained such narrow parameters for the past twenty years.

Even as discussions of modernism have evolved and critical inquiries into Bergson's influence have flourished, the relationship between the ideas of W.B. Yeats and Henri Bergson remains virtually unexplored. One potential reason for this lack of discussion stems perhaps from Yeats's unstable place in modernism and the exclusivity that the term still generates among many critics. Although most scholars acknowledge that Yeats's later works like *The Tower, The Winding Stair,* and *A Vision,* deserve the "modernist" label, many anthologies and large scale studies of modernism still often relegate Yeats to the margins. Similarly, studies of Henri Bergson's influence on modernist literature rarely include Yeats and never discusses him at length in connection with Bergson. In fact, the exceptional 2013 anthology *Understanding Bergson, Understanding Modernism* does not even list Yeats in the index. Yeats's substantial body

of work is not mentioned even in passing within the diverse conversations included in this otherwise well-executed anthology.

As in other similar studies, Yeats is overshadowed by the familiar list of his younger contemporaries—most prominently, Eliot, Joyce, Pound, and Woolf. This separation is in many ways self-initiated, since Yeats famously referred to himself as "the last Romantic" and frequently distanced himself from his younger modernist peers. Born seventeen years before Joyce and Woolf, and over twenty years before Pound and Eliot, Yeats literally belonged to a different generation. These younger writers were born into a literary world of Decadence and Symbolism that Yeats helped to construct. His poetic and dramatic career more immediately inherited the legacy of the Romantics and the Pre-Raphaelites, and his work had already moved through the growing pains of Symbolism and the Celtic Twilight years before his younger contemporaries even began to write.

For many of these young modernists, Yeats served as a complicated role model—the accomplished poet and dramatist they longed to be, but also the embodiment of tradition, a poet stuck in the past. Authors who were incredibly indebted to Yeats's work and even his personal support, often mocked his style and personal eccentricities. Ezra Pound, for example, travelled to Europe with the purpose of meeting Yeats and becoming his protégé. James Joyce owed much of his career to Yeats even though he publically distanced himself from him and his nationalistic brand of Irishness. T.S. Eliot jokingly referred to him as "Uncle Willie," and Woolf, showing slightly more admiration, still describes him as an eccentric poetic elder. In some ways, Yeats deserves his status as "Uncle Willie"—the older, peculiar relative who isn't quite trendy enough to socialize

with his more avant-garde nieces and nephews. And yet he shares more in common with these bold younger writers than many people realize.

This generational gap is also important because it has allowed critics to justify distancing Yeats and his work from many modernist discussions. They emphasize Yeats's roots in Romanticism, his unconventional interest in mysticism and the occult, his dedication to Irish cultural nationalism, and his general lack of stylistic experimentation—a hallmark of, and litmus test for, modernist writing. Although these associations are mostly accurate and cannot be ignored or divorced from discussions about the author's work, they do not fully represent the complexities of Yeats career and the continuous evolution of his craft and artistic vision.

Yeats's poetry may not be as overtly experimental in the same way as Eliot or Pound's, for example, but his work does push the boundaries of tradition and stylistic convention in ways that are no less revolutionary and modern, even if they are perhaps more subtle in their execution. In order to have a meaningful discussion about Yeats's body of work, therefore, it seems important to recognize the presence of all of these incredibly diverse influences and intersections and their contribution to the richness and dynamism of a career spanning five turbulent decades. Yeats participated in, responded to, and helped shape numerous literary movements, and throughout these shifts, his work never became stagnant. It always evolved and changed; it never abandoned its roots and early influences, but it became a constant process of perpetually rethinking, reexamining, and reinventing. It is my hope that by exploring Yeats's unique brand of modernism and its unexpected overlap with Bergsonian philosophy, this project can reshape and expand

our notion of the term and the period, ultimately adopting a more Bergsonian ideal of unity through heterogeneity.

Mina Bergson and the Order of the Golden Dawn

Although little is written about the direct and indirect links between Henri Bergson and W.B. Yeats, these connections not only exist but are actually remarkably plentiful and worth exploration. I think scholars frequently overlook this subtle relationship because they do not see an immediate connection between the two authors. Other modernist writers like T.S. Eliot are discussed in relation to Bergson because we know that Eliot attended Bergson's lectures and was openly influenced by Bergson's ideas regarding time and flux. Even an author like Virginia Woolf, who supposedly never met or read Bergson, is discussed in relation to the French philosopher because her work seems so overtly Bergsonian in its interest in non-linear time. W.B. Yeats, on the other hand—an author who is remarkably transparent about his influences, citing the important roles that writers like Blake and Shelley have had on his work—rarely mentions Bergson at all and never credits him as a direct influence. In fact, Yeats only refers to Bergson directly a handful of times throughout his career, usually in letters, and many of the remarks are not entirely complimentary. Although Yeats rarely discusses Bergson's work or influence, it is impossible to ignore that their interests and social circles overlapped in numerous and significant ways.

One of the most direct links between the two major figures is through Henri Bergson's younger sister, Mina Bergson, who changed her name to 'Moina'—to sound more Celtic—after marrying the prominent occult leader Samuel Lidell 'MacGregor'

Mathers on June 16, 1890. By the time the two were married, MacGregor Mathers was already an important figure in occult society. He had been a Mason since 1877, and was a member of the Theosophical Society, as well as Anna Kingsford and Edward Maitland's Hermetic Society; he studied with Madame Blavatsky in 1886, and in 1888 founded the incredibly influential Isis-Urania Temple of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (Greer 55-56). The Golden Dawn—an amalgam of the eastern and western rituals practiced in freemasonry, theosophy, and spiritualism—was also different from all the other esoteric and occult societies that MacGregor Mathers belonged to because it was dedicated to the actual practice of magic in addition to the passing down of occult knowledge (Butler 9). According to Mary K. Greer, MacGregor Mathers "saw himself as a spiritual warrior" (50), and she compares his mentor Anna Kingsford to "other mystics" like Blake, Bergson, and Swedenborg, who believed "intuition or imagination was the source of wisdom" (54).

Greer's inclusion of Bergson in this list of "mystics" calls attention to the metaphysical background of the philosopher's ideas and its similarities with many aspects of the Golden Dawn. Bergson's sister, Moina, who was raised in an orthodox Jewish family where she became familiar with Kabbalistic teachings, was drawn to MacGregor Mathers's mysticism and immediately became the first member and high priestess of the Order of the Golden Dawn. Moina quickly became a major figure in the esoteric circles of London and Paris, and through a shared interest in occult practices, became close friends with W.B. Yeats, who was drawn to the Order of the Golden Dawn because of "its focus on practical magic and use of symbols to induce visions" (Butler

172). Like Moina and MacGregor Mathers, Yeats was an active member of esoteric and occult society, and when he joined the Order of the Golden Dawn on March 7, 1890, the initiation was performed by Mina Bergson (not yet married) in her studio on Fitzroy Street (Kelly 19).

For many years, Yeats remained close with Moina and MacGregor Mathers, even frequently staying with them when he visited London and Paris—usually in an effort to meet with Maud Gonne. We know from a brief reference in "The Trembling of the Veil" that Yeats definitely knew that Moina was "the sister of the philosopher, Henri Bergson" (160), and since he met Moina in the early 1890s, he was aware of Bergson and his success quite a while before the philosopher gained popularity in England, which reached a cultural zenith soon after his works were translated into English in 1910 by Arthur Mitchell and 1911 by Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer.[8] In fact, according to Yeats's *Memoirs*, the poet actually met Henri Bergson in February of 1894 while staying with Moina and MacGregor Mathers in Paris, noting that "Bergson came to call, very well dressed and very courteous. He was but an obscure professor and MacGregor Mathers was impatient. 'I have shown him all that my magic can do and I have no effect upon him'" (73). In 1894 Bergson would have been at the very beginning of his academic and philosophical career in France, having published his dissertation *Time and Free Will* only a few years earlier in 1889. Although this is the only mention of an encounter

[8] Arthur Mitchell translated Bergson's *Creative Evolution* in 1910 and Paul and Palmer translated *Matter and Memory* in 1911.

between the two great minds, it is possible to imagine that they met on other occasions since according to Greer, Henri lived near his sister and most likely met with her often (42).

Moina and MacGregor Mathers became important figures in Yeats's mystical life, and they remained so even after their friendship with the poet dissipated. The Golden Dawn, and Yeats's friendship with the Matherses, fell apart around 1900 when MacGregor Mathers admitted that the founding documents of the order were forged. Yeats spent very little time with either of them after that until years later, after MacGregor Mathers's death[9], Yeats and Moina ran into each other. However, when Moina read Yeats's unflattering depiction of her husband in "The Trembling of the Veil," she wrote to him on January 5, 1924 to express her anger and disappointment at the "inaccuracies" and "half truths" of his caricatured portrait (447): "Now with this awful book of yours between us I can never meet you again or be connected with you in any way save you make such reparation as may lie in your power" (448). She suggests that Yeats could make these reparations by "[refuting] at least some of the lying statements" in a future text (448). Appearing to be genuinely apologetic, Yeats continued his correspondence with Moina into early February of 1924, and seems to have taken her suggestion to heart since he dedicates the first version of *A Vision* in 1925 to "Vestigia"—Moina Mathers's magical name within the Order of the Golden Dawn.

Although one might be inclined to see Yeats's dedication to Moina as a mere gesture to make amends with an old friend, it seems unlikely that he would treat a text

[9] MacGregor Mathers died in 1918.

that had taken him over eight years to produce with any kind of flippancy or nonchalance. By 1925, *A Vision* was composed of 10,000 manuscript and typed pages, 4,000 pages of Automatic Script, and 2,000 handwritten pages (Paul and Harper xxii). Unsure whether his text was "genius" or "obsession," Yeats had only 600 copies published by T. Werner Laurie on Jan. 15, 1926 (Paul and Harper xxi-xxii). Margaret Mills Harper notes that this small print run was intended for a special audience of fellow occultists ("The clocks" 193). The dedication itself, however, reveals even more selectivity, with Yeats separating himself and Moina from their occult contemporaries, noting that they are different from other "students of philosophy or religion" due to their "belief that truth cannot be discovered but may be revealed, and that if man do not lose faith, and if he go through certain preparations, revelation will find him at the fitting moment" (Paul and Harper liv). This distinction between discovery and disclosure possesses subtle echoes of Bergsonian logic. In *Matter and Memory*, for example, Bergson criticizes the notion that the brain is a repository for stored memories, a physical space that can be accessed at will. Instead, he argues that memories cannot be stored or destroyed; the brain can block memories or keep us from recalling things, but all past experiences exist in perpetual motion and memories are recalled when they are needed not when we attempt to access them. As Guerlac puts it, "Memory does not proceed from the present back into the past. It proceeds from the past into the present, by actualizing itself" (140).

Although Moina and her brother did not agree on all philosophical issues, there are frequent echoes of his theories in her words and her actions within The Golden Dawn, which means that Yeats was exposed to these ideas, though perhaps indirectly and out of

context. Often times the connections between Moina's philosophy and that of her brother's are quite subtle. For example, in the Golden Dawn, each member has a code name and motto, and Moina's motto in Latin was "Vestigia Nulla Retrorsum," which translates to "no backward steps." Moina's motto is reminiscent of her brother Henri's philosophy of change, where the past is always present, and the present is only a process of becoming. For Bergson, it is impossible to go back to a moment because as you attempt to recollect, you are in that moment a new person and so your experience of that memory can never be the same. Moina also asserts, "We cannot understand Matter without understanding Spirit. [...] We cannot understand Spirit without understanding Matter" (qtd. in Greer 57), which sounds as if it could have come directly from Henri Bergson's *Matter and Memory*—a text which addresses "the problem of the relation between soul and body" (x). In his conclusion, for example, Bergson notes, "If pure recollection is spirit, and if pure perception is still in a sense matter, we ought to be able, by placing ourselves at their meeting place, to throw some light on the reciprocal action of spirit and matter" (325). Due to Yeats's relationship with Moina and the Order of the Golden Dawn, he was exposed to Bergsonian ideas long before he read and studied the philosopher's work for himself.

Metaphysics and Psychical Research

Based on Yeats's alignment with Wyndham Lewis's ideas in *Time and Western Man*, it would be easy to assume that Yeats and Bergson have entirely disparate philosophical backgrounds; however, a closer look at their shared interest in metaphysics and mysticism, as well as a common lineage with Romantic vitalism, reveals that Yeats

and Bergson have far more in common than is initially apparent. Much has been written about Yeats's profound interest in mysticism, the occult, and paranormal activity, and these interests seem to culminate in *A Vision*, which presents a single eccentric system created through a densely woven web of various eastern and western mysticisms and Kabbalistic teachings, and is predicated on a belief in astrology, numerology, and magic. *A Vision*'s origins and authorship are also unique since the text began as a collaborative experiment with his wife, George, and her experience with automatic writing involving spirits or "Communicators," as Yeats called them. Again, at first glance, Yeats's interests may seem antithetical to Bergson, a scientist and mathematician turned philosopher. However, Bergson's ideas are not in complete opposition to Yeats's mysticism. In fact, Bergson was deeply intrigued by metaphysics, spiritualism, and the paranormal.

Bergson approaches mysticism from a uniquely scientific and philosophical perspective, but surprisingly he does not disregard it as irrational or superfluous. Instead, he values magic and mysticism as a form of "dynamic religion," which is opposed to "static religion" and becomes "the main organ through which life assures progress both for individuals and for the human race as a whole" (Kolakowski 81). As Lesnek Kolakowski notes, dynamic religion for Bergson becomes the expression of *elan vital*: "Through the religious efforts of great mystics mankind goes back to the very source of Being" (81). According to G. William Barnard, Bergson was extremely interested in "non-ordinary modes of consciousness," and points out that few contemporary Bergsonian scholars emphasize Bergson's spiritual qualities partly due to Gilles Deleuze's intentional neglect (250). Barnard claims that most modern scholars are

familiar with Bergson through Deleuze's scholarship, and since he repeatedly deemphasizes Bergson's interest in the spiritual and paranormal, few scholars are even aware of its presence in Bergson's work.

Unlike Yeats, Bergson was not a member of any of the numerous theosophical or hermetic societies popular in London and Paris at the turn of the century. He did, however, join the *Institut Psychologique Internationale* in 1900 to study "non-ordinary phenomena," and was later appointed—rather unexpectedly—president of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), where he delivered his presidential address titled, "'Phantoms of the Living' and Psychical Research," in London on May 28, 1913 (Barnard 251-52). Interestingly, W.B. Yeats had just joined the Society for Psychical Research in February of that same year, though it appears that both men had been engaged in a pursuit of the paranormal for quite a few years prior. In 1913, the Society for Psychical Research was a fascinating blend of believers and skeptics, composed of members who were all interested in investigating and studying paranormal and non-ordinary phenomena. Although Yeats certainly leaned more towards the side of the believer, while Bergson—along with his American friend and philosopher William James—remained more skeptical, both men were engaged in a sincere pursuit of evidence via personal observation.

W.B. Yeats was a devout believer in the power of magic, but he was interested in more than just the study of magic; he also wanted to practice magic and prove that these mystic encounters were real. In fact, Yeats was asked to resign from the Theosophical Society, led by the infamous Madame Blavatsky, because he wanted to test their beliefs

and put their ideas into practice (Greer 93). This is partly why Yeats was drawn to The Order of the Golden Dawn. Greer notes that for Yeats, the stagnant study of magic was not enough, "there was something about ritual that promoted action," and MacGregor and Moina Mathers were open to both the study and practice of magic and the implementation of ritual and symbolism (Greer 96). The Golden Dawn, however, did not advocate mediumship or participation in séances because they believed that "the active will was surrendered for the passivity of trance" (Goldman 114). Despite the Golden Dawn's discouragement, Yeats became particularly interested in séances and mediumship after returning from America in 1911 and witnessing the automatic writing sessions of Elizabeth Radcliffe (Goldman 114).[10] Radcliffe was a prominent alleged medium, and Yeats's multiple sessions with her allowed him to observe and test his beliefs. Goldman asserts that through these experiences, Yeats gained an appreciation for the scientific process of experimentation that the more skeptical members of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) utilized, eventually moving "towards the mainstream, less committed, more skeptical group" (122). He also claims that Yeats's adoption of these experimental, scientific techniques, coupled with his desire to prove the authenticity of these experiences, made him "pursue subjects with more rigorous tenacity and logic" (122).

As Yeats altered his approach to embrace the more scientific methods of skeptical SPR members, Bergson conducted his own experiments with the paranormal and found himself surprisingly persuaded. Between 1905 and 1906, Bergson attended and participated in a number of séances with the famous medium Eusapia Palladino (Barnard

[10] When Yeats first met Radcliffe in October of 1912, she produced automatic writing for him (Kelly 158).

251).[11] Although Bergson approached these séances with more scientific skepticism than Yeats, he also believed after observation that many aspects of the experience appeared to be legitimate, and in a rare interview with George Menuíer in 1910, he admits that there is possible evidence in favor of telepathy and mediumship (Barnard 252). Barnard notes that "Bergson also postulates that some of what we remember, think, and feel may in fact originate from minds other than our own" since consciousness is not spatial and cannot be contained in the physical brain (238). Bergson's validation of the potential of mediumship and clairvoyance is important because it suggests that his philosophy is not counter to the process that gave birth to Yeats's *A Vision*. The automatic writing sessions that George Yeats began shortly after their wedding night are the origins of *A Vision*, and Yeats claims in the introduction to *A Vision* (1937) that an "unknown writer" provided, through George, "disjointed sentences, in almost illegible writing," which the poet agreed to "spend what remained of life explaining and piecing together" (*AVB* 7).[12] While numerous critics, and even friends, of Yeats felt that *A Vision*, and its process of authorship, was little more than madness, Bergsonian philosophy allows for the possibility of such a unique authorial collaboration.

Bergson's scientific study of the paranormal led him to believe that his philosophy for understanding time and consciousness could be used to help explain a number of these non-ordinary experiences. G. Williams Barnard explains Bergson's "filter theory of consciousness" by comparing the Bergsonian brain to a receiver: the

[11] For a detailed account of Bergson's experience at these séances, see G. William Barnard's chapter "Bergson and Non-Ordinary Experiences" in *Living Consciousness* and R.C. Grogin's *The Bergsonian Controversy in France 1900—1914*.

[12] Throughout this document, *AVA* will be used parenthetically to reference the 1925 version of Yeats's *A Vison* while *AVB* will be used parenthetically to reference its 1937 version.

radio waves exist all around us and yet we only tune in to specific frequencies (243). Bergson believes that the brain and the mind are very different. The brain is a tangible thing, but the mind is not. The mind is not merely a receptacle for stored memories. According to Bergson, the mind is a filter for memory and since consciousness is not spatial, it cannot be contained in the brain. All of our memories and experiences are constantly present and moving, and the mind filters what we need in that moment. In simplified terms, we do not reach in to the mind and recover a memory; instead, the mind throws a memory forward from our past at the moment that we most need it.

Since Bergson argues that consciousness is memory and memory is composed of constant interpenetrating memory-images, then by tapping into what Barnard describes as a particular "frequency," we could find ourselves connecting with other people's consciousness. Barnard even claims that "Bergson suggests, therefore, that it is quite possible that our minds are continually blending and overlapping with other minds" (238). Bergson describes something similar when he asserts that "between certain minds there may be continually taking place changes analogous to the phenomena of endosmosis" (*Mind-Energy* 59). From a Bergsonian perspective, George Yeats's automatic writing sessions could be viewed as an example of psychic endosmosis, where suppression of the conscious mind through meditation allows intuition to dominate and to access a deeper consciousness that is perhaps not limited to the individual. This Bergsonian reading of *A Vision*'s clairvoyant origins coincides with Yeats's belief in a universal mind, what he describes as Anima Mundi, a concept similar to Jung's notion of a collective unconscious.

Barnard even suggests that creative work could then be seen as others, or a deeper self, working through the artist (243). Interestingly, Bergson did not believe that only artists could experience this or create. According to Barnard, Bergson's idealistic egalitarian view suggests that anyone could be an artist if he or she allows themselves to give in to intuition—to seek that deeper self and use art as a way to reproduce and communicate experience, but also turn over that experience to the perceiver:

> If we can begin to let go of the idea that we are banded, atomistic, billiard balls of dead matter that bump against each other in mechanistically predictable ways; if we can begin, instead, to view ourselves as something closer to a relatively stable whirlpool in a surging sea of consciousness; if we can begin to see ourselves as a dynamic yet cohesive, utterly unique, patterning of consciousness that is open to influxes from other configurations of consciousness…, then it also becomes incredibly possible to make sense of numerous sociological phenomena […]. (Barnard 244)

This shared background in mysticism and spiritualism is important because it shows an intellectual kinship that I think becomes even more prominent and clear when we look at *A Vision* and Yeats's complex system for understanding historical shifts and all of human experience. Bergson and Yeats are both skeptics but also believers. They are mystics as well as scientific observers. They find value in intellect and intuition, and rather than assert definitive conclusions, they both prefer to navigate through the complicated disorder of antinomies.

Although Yeats and Bergson are rarely discussed in the same conversations, their similarities should not come as a complete surprise given that these contemporaries have so many overlapping philosophical and literary influences. Broadly speaking, both authors emerge from the Romantic literary landscape of Coleridge. Jack Haeger

emphasizes this indebtedness for Bergson by arguing that in order to historically contextualize Bergson's philosophy we have to understand that it emerges from a mixture of French traditionalism, German idealism, and the Romanticism of Coleridge (98). Yeats is also deeply influenced by the Romantics, particularly Coleridge and Shelley, and Coleridge's version of Romanticism is also closely linked with the idealistic, anti-materialist Vitalism of the mid to late nineteenth century. Although scientifically discredited, Vitalism hypothesized that living organisms are fundamentally different than non-living entities and that what separates them is the "vital spark," a quality which some equated with the soul. Bergson's *élan vital* fits into this philosophy, and Bergson is usually associated with the Vitalist movement, even though he was not one of the primary spokesmen. Although not usually associated with the formal school of Vitalism, William Blake embraced its anti-materialist philosophy, and George Rousseau even describes Blake's system as "a cosmic Romantic vitalism" (46). Yeats, of course, is influenced deeply by Blake's metaphysical work and system, and Blake's notion of "Energy" as the life force of the world seems strikingly similar to Bergson's *élan vital*.

In addition to this mutual lineage of nineteenth-century Romanticism and Vitalism, Yeats and Bergson also share specific philosophical interests. For example, George Mills Harper and Margaret Mills Harper note in their exceptional introduction to Yeats's Vision Papers that the French historian and physicist Pierre Duhem's *Système du monde* was an important source for the 1937 version of *A Vision* (xxvii). According to Jimena Canales, Pierre Duhem was also an "important influence on Bergson and many of

his disciples," explaining that "Bergson found profound affinities between his philosophy and that of Duhem" (211).

Additionally, both Yeats and Bergson held a particular affinity for the idealist theories of Bishop Berkeley (1685-1753). As a prominent anti-materialist, Berkeley deemphasized the value of objects, believing that all non-mental forms of matter are illusory. Bergson's friend and biographer Vladimir Jankélévitch frequently compares Bergson's ideas to Berkeley's theories on optics, and notes that both are "equally nominalist, equally hostile to unconscious abstractions, agree in purifying the immediate lived from the superstructures that encumber it: We remember an absence. But we perceive only presences" (188). Similarly, Declan Kiberd points out that Yeats was anti-Lockian, preferring Berkeley to other philosophers like Locke because "Berkeley believed that things exist only in so far as we perceive them. Yeats went further to assert that each man or woman creates a purely personal world, as against Locke who claimed that, under standard conditions, each person would see 'the same thing'" (322). Neil Mann even notes that

> Yeats accepts much of Berkeley's idealism but substitutes a multitudinous community of perceivers for a single 'powerful spirit' or deity," rejecting Berkeley's belief in an active God and passive perceiver and choosing instead to believe that "spirits are both passive and active in their perceiving. (9)

Yeats's centralist approach to Berkeley's idealism echoes Bergson's, and both writers gesture towards a dualistic tension rather than one particular extreme.

Yeats's Double Gyre

Although Yeats, in many ways, is a traditionalist who values form, structure, and order, I agree with James Logenbach that Yeats is fundamentally a poet of change: "Sometimes he was forced to change by the events of his time but, more profoundly, Yeats forced change upon himself" (Logenbach 320). He is an artist whose oeuvre is far from monolithic. His work cannot be described in only one way, and he cannot be associated with only one movement; his work changes and evolves with each turbulent decade. Logenbach notes this difficulty in Yeats and links it to modernism, since both are rooted in conflict, inconsistency, and juxtaposition (328). Yeats, much like Virginia Woolf, is a difficult author to write about because his work is constantly changing and because he seems to revel in inconsistency and paradox. Declarations are frequently undercut by questions, such that his style mimics the dialectic structure of his content. This is best exemplified in *A Vision,* a text whose description can only be given through paradoxical language:

> It is a comedy and tragedy: a grave and playful, poetic and geometric, concrete and abstract, earnest and slippery work, aiming to be all at once a work of theoretical history, an esoteric philosophy, an aesthetic symbology, a psychological schema, and a sacred book. (*AVA* xxiv)

Yeats's eccentric, multi-genre work *A Vision*—which exists in two distinct but related forms—is a text that Margaret Mills Harper refers to as "an outlier in the Yeatsian corpus" ("The clocks" 189). It is an unusually difficult text, steeped in dense and obscure literary, philosophical, and occult references. Like Eliot's *The Waste Land* or Joyce's *Ulysses, A Vision* is saturated with allusions and intertextuality—overlapping, and at

times conflating, a number of philosophical and religious traditions. It is also a text which still relatively few Yeatsian scholars choose to study independent from W.B. Yeats's poetry. Although I agree with the majority of scholars who feel that *A Vision* is essential to an understanding of Yeats's later poetry—specifically *The Tower* and *The Winding Stair*—I also regard it as a modernist text worth consideration on its own. Its unusual mystical origins only magnify and complicate the ways we understand genre and authorship in the text, and its emphasis on difficulty and intertextuality places it squarely within the modernist purview. It is a hybrid text that gestures towards coherence and unity but recognizes and highlights its own inconsistencies and fragmentation.

A Vision presents a complex system of esoteric and occult symbolism that Yeats believes will "proclaim a new divinity" (*AVB* 20). The philosophy is accompanied by a series of diagrams and charts which are based primarily on two separate models of movement: the gyre and the wheel. According to Charles D. Minahen's thorough history of the origins of symbolic turbulence, the symbol of the vortex or whirlpool represents a complicated dialectic between creation and destruction (8-10). A fluid and dynamic image, it is usually "generative and creative" (Minahen 8). Minahen even breaks the image of the vortex into specific components—"the point, the line, the curve, the center, the circle, and […] the spiral"—and associates the symbol with the concepts of "polar opposition, dynamic interaction, synthesis and mystical transformation" (4). Yeats's use of the gyre, or vortex, is grounded in a rich symbolic history that begins with Empedocles and appears more recently in Dante and Blake.

What is particularly interesting about Yeats's symbology, however, is his specific implementation of the double gyre[13]—not a single vortex but two interlocking and interpenetrating antithetical gyres with "the apex of each vortex in the middle of the other's base" (*AVB* 50). These gyres, or cones as Yeats sometimes calls them, are inextricably linked, with one increasing while the other diminishes in a constant state of dilation and contraction. Yeats's "double cone or vortex" represents "subjectivity and objectivity as intersecting states struggling one against the other" (*AVB* 52). This dominant image exists on the micro level of the individual as well as the macro level of the cosmos. What is most striking about the image of the double gyre is the fact that it is paradoxically a stable image of perpetual reciprocal movement, one which allows antinomies to exist in unresolved but necessary tension. This dominant image of the double gyre throughout *A Vision* and its implied movement is also surprisingly Bergsonian.

Though not originating with Bergson, the double gyre fits into a Bergsonian metaphor for the conceptualization of time and duration found in the philosopher's 1903 text, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*:

> This inner life may be compared to the unrolling of a coil, for there is no living being who does not feel himself coming gradually to the end of his role; and to live is to grow old. But it may just as well be compared to a continual rolling up, like that of a thread on a ball, for our past follows us, it swells incessantly with the present that it picks up on its way; and consciousness means memory. (*An Introduction* 8)

[13] Charles D. Minahen suggests that Yeats's double gyre originates in Empedocles's double process (20).

While Bergson proposes this metaphor as a possible explanation for duration, he goes on to suggest that ultimately it is flawed—like all linguistic attempts to conceptualize time. The metaphor fails for Bergson because the rolling and unrolling

> evoke the idea of lines and surfaces whose parts are homogenous and superposable on one another. Now, there are no two identical moments in the life of the same conscious being […] because the second moment always contains, over and above the first, the memory that the first has bequeathed to it. (*An Introduction* 8)

For Bergson, this image is useful but still problematic because it can never accurately capture the "unity of the advancing moment" as well as the "multiplicity of expanding states" (*An Introduction* 9). As Paul Harris notes, "he literally wants it both ways: he needs the thread unwinding off the coil to figure human finitude, and the ball winding up, growing bigger, as the thread of the present accumulates more and more memory" (104).[14] Yeats's image of the double gyres, however, ingeniously blends this dynamic motion with stability and embodies simultaneous multidirectional movement that maintains unity as well as multiplicity. One image may not be able to capture perfectly Bergson's understanding of real durational time, but Yeats's double gyre comes as close to that Bergsonian ideal as possible through its simultaneous, yet paradoxical, synchronous movement.

The two cones, which Yeats describes at one point as Concord and Discord, are never separated from one another like in the image of an hourglass. Instead, they overlap

[14] Paul Harris also creatively applies chaos theory to Bergson's failed "ball of thread" metaphor for duration, noting that Bergson's ideal metaphor for duration actually exists in the chaos diagram of a Lorentz attractor—an image of "two disk-like configurations […] intertwined by trajectories that cross over from one to the other" (104). Harris's linguistic and visual depiction of the Lorentz attractor bears a striking resemblance to Yeats's interlocking gyres.

so that when one cone diminishes, the other increases, "one gyre within the other always" (*AVB* 50). This overlap and interpenetration is what makes the image so effectively Bergsonian. Calvin Bedient even describes Yeats's interlocking cones with echoes of Bergsonian language, seeing them as "tornadic, dynamic, a flux" (4). Despite the fact that *A Vision* systematically categorizes and delineates time and human experience—an act that initially seems counter to Bergson's notion of duration—details of the text also suggest that this categorization is a conscious spatializing process utilized by the author to facilitate creative production. After all, the origins of *A Vision* lie in W.B. Yeats and George Yeats's Automatic Script, a product of mediumship that for years produced "disjointed sentences, in almost illegible writing" (*AVB* 7). Because of the Automatic Script, Yeats became an interpreter of patterns and symbols, and if we take the author at his word, then his system is "plainly symbolical" rather than literal (*AVB* 19). The meticulous categorization becomes for Yeats a process of understanding rather than a product of experience. The text itself, even in its revised form, remains in a Bergsonian process of becoming.

This is why, like Barbara Croft, I propose that *A Vision* is not a fixed system to be worked out. It requires "a less logical and more intuitive approach" because it "is not definitive; it gives no answers and reaches no conclusions […] it is generative; it sets the mind dreaming, wandering in a vast, endless speculation that is, in itself, satisfying" (Croft 9). Croft's proposed approach, I would argue, is in fact the implementation of a Bergsonian method. Intellect is required but it must yield to intuition, and process and change are privileged above resolution. While it is tempting to lose oneself in the

meticulous systemization of Yeats's philosophy, to see it only as a complex intellectual puzzle that produces definitive truths upon careful study and reflection, such an approach is potentially reductive because it stabilizes a text that is grounded in exploration and movement. What appears to be fixed is actually uncertain and in a process of perpetual revision. The displaced authorship of the text helps create this uncertainty. Yeats is not presenting a fully formed system of his own creation; he is only interpreting a system given to him by the Communicators—a system that after ten years of revision, Yeats still struggles to fully comprehend and views as "incomplete, imperfect, inadequate" (Harper and Paul xxiii). His hesitancy is apparent throughout the text, even in the beginning letter, "To Ezra Pound," when he repeatedly asks "What if": "What if there is an arithmetic or geometry that can exactly measure the slope of a balance, the dip of a scale, and so date the coming of something?" (*AVB* 22). So much of Yeats's work asks rather than asserts. It entertains possibilities without the need for resolution even as it strives for answers—a process that is deeply Bergsonian.

Calvin Bedient, one of the few scholars to actually connect Yeats to Bergson, notes that *A Vision* "for all its geometrical systematization of the rotational laws of physics, history, the drives, personality" is ultimately Yeats's "concerted contribution to a scientific knowledge of reality as a great and constant agitation of change" (2). Henri Bergson claims that language problematically "spatializes time, translating the (unsegmented) motion of thought into the segmentation of the space that motion transgresses" (Mattison 323), but he also acknowledges the paradoxical dilemma of language as our primary means of interpretation. Bergson is not anti-intellect or anti-

reason, he simply advocates for the inclusion of intuition and imagination into the intellectual process. To me, Yeats's system in *A Vision* recognizes the limitations of language but pushes against them in an almost desperate effort to gain control. For all its specificity and structure, *A Vision* is less about systematic order and more about the necessary tension between pattern and flux. As Daniel Albright notes, Yeats's images are imaginative and dislocating rather than stable and fixed—images that "oscillate" and "radiate" and "become energized" (31). Yeats's images are also Bergsonian images, which is why I contend that a Bergsonian reading of a text like *A Vision* can prove to be critically fruitful. After all, Henri Bergson's philosophies are all rooted in a middle way reminiscent of Yeats. He is not a pure idealist or a devout realist, for example. He is not exclusively a scientist or a mystic. His philosophies offer an alternate path that avoids extremes, celebrates contradictions, and exists comfortably within the flux of experience.

This approach seems applicable to the study of Yeats since "his own work is itself so riven with contradiction" (Logenbach 327). As Logenbach notes, "However much his work itself changed, his faith in change did not waver, and of one thing we may always be sure: if Yeats states a position strongly in a particular poem, he will somewhere else contradict it" (327). This is why I propose that one way to read a text like *A Vision* is through a Bergsonian lens. Rather than choosing between definitive meanings or meticulously untangling Yeats's complex intertextual web, we approach his text through his own antithetical method. We sit within those contradictions; we let them whirl around us and wash over us; we let our thoughts twist and turn, contract and dilate, just like

Yeats's interlocking gyres; and we do all of this without needing to find a center to gain perspective or ground ourselves.

Annotating Bergson

It may, at first, seem odd to apply a Bergsonian lens to a text like *A Vision* since very little has been written about the two authors' relationship and Yeats does not explicitly credit Bergson as a literary influence. However, Yeats's awareness of Bergson's work is indisputable. Not only did Yeats meet Henri Bergson and become aware of his work early in Bergson's career through his sister, Mina, but Yeats also read and engaged with the philosopher's most prominent works at a key moment in his own literary development. Unlike Virginia Woolf, who apparently never read Bergson but whose work appears dramatically influenced by his philosophies concerning time, memory, and consciousness, W.B. Yeats attentively read at least two of Bergson's primary works, meticulously annotating them as he revised and restructured *A Vision* for its 1937 publication. Roger N. Parsious originally photocopied these annotations in 1968, and in 1985, when Edward O'Shea first catalogued Yeats's personal library—which was maintained by his daughter Anne Yeats in Dalkey—he notes annotated copies of both Bergson's *Creative Evolution* (1922) and *Matter and Memory* (1919).[15] According to O'Shea, Yeats organized his private library thematically, and Bergson's texts were included in the philosophy section (x). O'Shea remarks that Yeats read most of his philosophical texts between 1925 and 1937 (xviii), so it is reasonable to assume that he

[15] *Creative Evolution* is listed as item 156 and *Matter and Memory* is listed as item 157 in O'Shea's *A Descriptive Catalog of W.B. Yeats's Library*.

read Bergson during this time period, especially since his copies are later editions of each text.[16] O'Shea also notes that much of Yeats's reading during these years was "to confirm the features of his system" in *A Vision*, and Yeats "found the works of Bergson, Croce, Whitehead, and McTaggart especially congenial," while he disliked the materialist philosophies of Bertrand Russell (xviii). The fact that Yeats disliked Russell is important because Russell was one of the most adamant and vocal early critics of Bergson.[17]

These annotations of Bergson's work are occasionally mentioned by scholars in passing—and Margaret Mills Harper and Catherine Paul thankfully note their presence in their newly annotated edition of the 1937 version of *A Vision*—but few, if any, scholars have taken the time to analyze these annotations or even acknowledge how much archival material there is to work with. This lack of discussion could be due partly to the fact that O'Shea does not include Bergson in his subject index, making it difficult to know that his transcribed annotations are included in his catalog. Perhaps because of this simple oversight, their existence went virtually unnoticed by scholars until the National Library of Ireland acquired and cataloged Yeats's personal library in 2002—though the actual photocopied pages still remain unpublished and unavailable in digital form. It is intriguing that Yeats is reading Bergson as he is revising *A Vision* in the late 1920s and early 1930s because Yeats is studying the charismatic philosopher just as Bergson's popularity is beginning to wane, with many of his early devotees—like Eliot, Pound, and Lewis—now denouncing him. Mary Ann Gillies notes that this decline in popularity

[16] *Creative Evolution* was first translated into English by Arthur Mitchell and published in 1911, but Yeats's edition is published in 1922. Likewise, *Matter and Memory* was originally translated into English by N. Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer in 1912, but Yeats's edition is from a 1919 reprint.
[17] See Bertrand Russell's 1912 essay "The Philosophy of Bergson" published in *The Monist*.

begins soon after WWI when Bergson's exciting, enthusiastic ideas—which once gave people control over their world—no longer seem relevant, causing those who studied Bergson to initially split into two groups: the formal students of philosophy, who became associated with Bergsonian studies, and the society intellectuals and artists, who often misinterpreted Bergson's ideas and spread different versions of Bergsonism (*Henri* 27). Bergson's popularity was also damaged on April 6, 1922 when he engaged in a public debate about time with Albert Einstein. This debate, in which Bergson critiqued Einstein's theory of time for its lack of intuition, permanently damaged Bergson's credibility and, according to Jimena Canales, created a cataclysmic and enduring fissure between science and the humanities that exists to this day (vii).[18] Therefore, it is interesting that Yeats begins to study Bergson seriously just as his cult-like status is beginning to fade, especially since he had known about Bergson's work and career for years before many of his contemporaries.

The use of the word "study" is intentional here because it is clear from Yeats's prolific annotations that he did not pick up Bergson's texts as a casual reader. He approaches each text as a scholar. While O'Shea provides basic transcriptions for the majority of marginalia in each text, his incredibly useful catalog does fail to note specific passages that have been underlined or marked within each text. Studying these annotated passages in addition to Yeats's marginal notes offers an amazing opportunity to see the poet thinking through a text, responding to it, and connecting it to his own ideas and philosophies. Although Bergson is not mentioned directly in *A Vision*, when we look

[18] See Jimena Canales's *The Physicist & The Philosopher: Einstein, Bergson, and the Debate that Changed Our Understanding of Time* for an in-depth look at this historic debate and its lasting impact.

closely at these documents, they reveal a much more engaged and nuanced relationship with Bergsonian ideas than one might expect. These notations disclose profound connections that Yeats made between Bergson's theories and his own work on *A Vision*.

In *Creative Evolution,* for example, Yeats marks a number of passages in the margins and underlines key sections on over fifty pages of text. Minor notes are scattered throughout and there are over fifteen dog-eared pages. Yeats appears to have read most of this text quite carefully,[19] relating the ideas back to his own system in *A Vision*. For example, on page 152 of *Creative Evolution,* Yeats's marginal annotation reads, "Mind & B.F. / also C.M." (O'Shea 20). Both of these abbreviations are common in Yeats's work, with B.F. referring to the *Body of Fate* and C.M. referencing the *Creative Mind*—both aspects of the *Four Faculties* found in the revised version of *A Vision*.[20] By referencing these terms in a section of Bergson's text that discusses consciousness and its relationship to instinct, Yeats draws a connection between Bergson's ideas and his own understanding of consciousness and memory. He defines "*Creative Mind* and *Body of Fate* as thought and its object, or the Knower and the Known" and describes both as "solar or *primary* or reasonable" (*AVB* 54). In Yeats's system, the *Faculties* make up the "special anatomy of the being" and deal with incarnate life and materiality (Mann 9). In fact, most of Yeats's notations throughout *Creative Evolution* refer back to the *Faculties* in some way, which seems appropriate given that Bergson is discussing physical evolution and the *Faculties* are Yeats's way of explaining the composition and action of life from birth to death.

[19] *Creative Evolution* is a 425 page text, and all of Yeats's comments and annotations occur on or before page 157. After page 157, there are no noted annotations.
[20] The *Faculties* include *Body of Fate*, *Creative Mind*, *Mask*, and *Will*.

While Yeats is clearly engaged with these ideas in Bergson's most popular text, *Creative Evolution*, and finds commonality with his own system, his annotations are less detailed and substantial than those in his copy of Bergson's *Matter and Memory*. His copy of Bergson's earlier text even begins with a substantial, interpretative annotation on the flyleaf that reads, "The future is—perception without memory—the present unites it to memory. The future is perceptible, but we do not know that we perceive it" (O'Shea 20). Yeats's copy of *Matter & Memory* includes fifty-five separate pages of extensive and substantive marginalia as well as dozens of underlined and marked passages and dog-eared pages, and it appears to be the Bergsonian text that Yeats finds most fascinating and relevant for his own work ("Annotated *Matter*"). Almost all of his notes in this text directly relate to concepts and systems present in the revised version of *A Vision*, and the text itself is mentioned explicitly on multiple occasions.[21] Some annotations are interpretative, but he connects each philosophical idea to his own system, questioning Bergson at times and agreeing with him in other moments, but most of all, engaging critically with the material. Yeats's annotations and marginalia reveal that he is certainly not a passive reader, glancing over the most recent literary and philosophical trend. Although O'Shea notes that "Yeats's annotations to his philosophy books will show that at times he misunderstood or read tendentiously, always with an eye on his own system," he also notes that they "show that Yeats, to use Harold Bloom's term, was a 'powerful misreader,' and he could turn misunderstanding into a productive creative strategy" (O'Shea xviii). In section V of his "Introduction to 'A Vision,'" Yeats recalls his time of

[21] For example, on page 39 of *Matter and Memory* Yeats writes, "In 'Vision' the senses limit perception. / A cup dipped into a sea of light that we may drink" in the right hand margin ("Annotated *Matter*).

philosophical study by stating, “I read with an excitement I had not known since I was a boy with all knowledge before me” (*AVB* 10). His substantial annotations in *Matter and Memory* are proof of this intellectual excitement. Yeats appears committed to understanding and unpacking Bergson’s ideas and relating them to his own, and his intense study of the text reveals quite a bit of philosophical common ground.

One of the first things to note about Yeats’s annotations is that they reveal the author’s scholarly practice of placing Bergson in conversation with other philosophers. Throughout the text and on numerous occasions, Yeats refers to a variety of philosophers, including Berkeley, Whitehead, Croce, and Leibniz. He seems interested in how these various theories overlap and compare, and since we know that Yeats valued the work of philosophers like Berkeley and Whitehead, it is important that Yeats places Bergson in their company. For example, at one point Yeats notes a particular passage refuting materialism with a vertical line and the simple annotation “Berkeley” in the margins, accurately identifying Berkeley’s presence in Bergson’s partial praise of idealism (“Annotated *Matter*” 80). Another annotation is more interpretative and claims, “Perception plus memory (Leibniz) = perception plus “nascent act” (Bergson)” (75). Additional notations mention Leibniz and Berkeley again as well as Whitehead, and Yeats seems to be at times distinguishing their philosophical ideas while also conflating them with his own. It is impossible to determine whether Yeats found true connections between his work and the philosophy he read, or whether he attempted to overlay his ideas on top of existing philosophical theories. However, regardless of the intention behind his reading, his annotations reveal a profound desire for connection and

understanding. Although certain annotations do push back against Bergson's theories, most of Yeats's marginalia and marked passages display an enthusiastic embrace of Bergsonian philosophy and a theoretical commutuality.

At all times Yeats remains an active reader, engaging with ideas and questioning rhetorical and philosophical choices. This is apparent when Yeats questions Bergson's terminology in an annotation of the following passage:

> The qualitative heterogeneity of our successive perceptions of the universe results from the fact that each, in itself, extends over a certain depth of duration, and that memory condenses in each an enormous multiplicity of vibrations which appear to us all at once, although they are successive. (*Matter and Memory* 76-77)

Yeats's marginal annotation reads, "why 'vibration'?" (77). While this simple question may seem insignificant, it reveals a level of critical engagement beyond casual study that calls attention to Yeats's investment in Bergson's theories.

Since Yeats's annotations in Bergson's *Matter and Memory* are so extensive, it is impossible to outline and analyze each one within the scope of this argument. And although I believe that these annotations deserve dedicated scholarly attention, I have attempted, for this project, to focus the conversation by approaching the annotations as a whole but also in a linear order, teasing out emerging patterns and priorities rather than looking at each individual notation. This chronological process of interpretation is, of course, speculative since we cannot know if the comments were made in a particular order; however, this approach productively allows the reader to imagine Yeats thinking through a text, processing it, and developing conclusions rather than making clear definitive assertions. After looking through the entirety of annotated and marked

passages, it becomes obvious that Yeats is connecting Bergson's theories of time and memory to his own system in *A Vision*, particularly his use of the double gyre as a dominant image for the system as well as his conceptions of the four *Principles* and the *Record* in the *Thirteenth Cone*.

Essential to Yeats's geometric based system is the image of the cone or gyre, and more specifically, the double gyre. This key image appears in some form multiple times within Yeats's annotations of Bergson's *Matter and Memory.* It is seen first in Chapter I as a small drawing of a triangle—or cone—in the margins next to a passage that emphasizes the role that images play in our ability to answer "whether the universe exists only in our thought, or outside of our thought" (*Matter* 13). The passage states,

> Now no philosophical doctrine denies that the same images can enter at the same time into two distinct systems, one belonging to *science*, wherin each image, related only to itself, possesses an absolute value; and the other, the world of *consciousness*, wherin all the images depend on a central image, our body, the variations of which they follow. (*Matter* 13-14)

Not only does Bergson's dualistic simultaneity echo Yeats's use of the double gyre, where subjectivity and objectivity are in a perpetual process of interpenetration, but it also highlights the philosopher's medial path between realism and idealism, an approach that also rings true in Yeats's work. Much of Bergson's *Matter and Memory* is an attempt to argue for a dualistic system that somehow overcomes the philosophical problems of dualism. Bergson notes in the introduction to *Matter and Memory*, for example, that "realism and idealism both go too far, that it is a mistake to reduce matter to the perception which we have of it, a mistake also to make of it a thing able to produce in us

perceptions, but in itself of another nature than they" (vii). Rather than choosing between realism and idealism, Bergson suggests an alternate path which emphasizes movement, multiplicity, and change—one that maintains dualities but exists without the need for resolution or stasis. I would argue that this philosophy is also a primary undercurrent for Yeats's system in *A Vision*.

Later in the text, Yeats includes a diagrammed version of his double gyre—though vertical like an hourglass rather than horizontal—with one base labelled "Space" and the other "Time" ("Annotated *Matter*" 69), drawing a comparison between Bergson's understanding of space and time and his own dualistic system of the *primary* and *antithetical tinctures*, also referred to as the objective and subjective cones. This correlation with the objective and subjective becomes more clear when Yeats underlines Bergson's statement that "Subject and object would unite in an extended perception," a passage immediately followed by Bergson's claim that "*Questions relating to subject and object, to their distinctions and their union, should be put in terms of time rather than of space"* (*Matter* 77). Yeats also draws the exact figure of the double cones that he uses in *A Vision* as well as a circle and left facing triangle next to a section where Bergson is beginning to outline the way that memory operates: "But already we may speak of the body as an ever advancing boundary between the future and the past, as a pointed end, which our past is continually driving forward into our future" (*Matter* 88). Yeats is clearly diagramming Bergson's theory and recognizing potential overlaps with his own system. Additionally, Yeats's notes call attention to his interest in, and emphasis on, both circular and vortical movement. This is seen at the end of Chapter IV in the marginal

annotation of a circle labelled "repetition" above a drawing of a circle and cone labelled "creation"—emphasizing his two principal images and a system that is cyclical but also generative rather than fixed and stable.

In addition to the diagrams of cones and gyres scattered throughout Yeats's copy of *Matter and Memory*, his annotations suggest that the poet found an interesting correlation between Bergson's complex understanding of memory and his own representation of the *Four Principles*. Yeats's marginalia is diverse, but a number of the annotations include abbreviated references to the *Passionate Body* (P.B.), the *Celestial Body* (C.B.), and the *Husk*—three of the *Four Principles* outlined in Yeats's system. For example, Yeats's first mention of these *Principles* occurs in Chapter I of *Matter and Memory* in a section where Bergson is discussing the difference between perception and memory. Next to the following passage, Yeats writes, "P.B. 'receives the C.B. from solitude'" ("Annotated *Matter*" 74)[22]:

> We have said that the material world is made up of objects, or, if you prefer it, of images, of which all the parts act and react upon each other by movements. And that which constitutes our pure perception is our dawning action, in so far as it is prefigured in those images. The *actuality* of our perception thus lies in its *activity*, in the movements which prolong it, and not in its greater intensity: the past is only idea, the present is ideo-motor. ("Annotated *Matter*" 74)[23]

In this key section of the text, Bergson explains the difference between pure perception and recollection, arguing that "pure perception [is] a system of nascent acts which plunges roots deep into the real; and at once perception is seen to be radically distinct

[22] My transcription varies slightly from O'Shea's here since I include Yeats's double quotation marks around "receives the C.B. from solitude," while O'Shea omits them.
[23] Yeats underlined this particular section and included a line linking it to his annotation: "P.B. 'receives C.B. from solitude'" ("Annotated *Matter*" 74). The underlining does not appear in Bergson's original text.

from recollection; the reality of things is no more constructed or reconstructed, but touched, penetrated, lived" (*Matter* 75). Bergson goes on in Chapter II to articulate his theory of memory and how the past survives into the present through two distinct but interrelated acts—habit memory and spontaneous memory or memory of the imagination. Habit memory for Bergson "involves the body and occurs through movements; the other involves images and occurs through representation" (Guerlac 125). Guerlac points out that "To speak of memory, however, is to speak of time—flowing time" (126), which is key when comparing Bergson's text with Yeats's *Four Principles*.

Throughout Yeats's annotations, a pattern of reading and interpretation becomes apparent. Yeats is drawn to Bergson's depiction of memory—which equates to time—and sees habit memory correlating with his own notion of the *Passionate Body* and the *Husk.* In Yeats's system, the *Four Principles* exist in an antithetical relationship to the *Four Faculties*, and "they oversee the soul's progress through the six discarnate states" (Dampier 55). While the *Faculties* deal with materiality and lived experience, the *Principles* focus on the spiritual and the experiences after death and between lives.[24] As Graham A. Dampier notes, "The *Faculties* are involved in material beings, while the *Principles* are transcendent" (55). It is interesting that Yeats's notes in *Creative Evolution* focus exclusively on the *Faculties* while his extensive notes in *Matter and Memory* are dominated by references to the *Principles*. In Yeats's system, the *Principle*s need the *Faculties* because the *Principles* do not create; they operate in the unconscious world. The *Passionate Body* and the *Husk*, however, are the two *Principles* most concerned with

[24] Yeats's system in *A Vision* presupposes reincarnation.

the physical body and lived experience, with all of these concepts relating to various aspects of time. In section III of "The Completed Symbol," Yeats explains that "Spirit is the future, Passionate Body the present, Husk the past, deriving its name from the husk that is abandoned by the sprouting seed" (*AVB* 140). He goes on to describe the Husk as the "involuntary self," a phrase that explicitly echoes Bergson's description of habit memory (*AVB* 140).

O'Shea makes note of many references to P.B, C.B, and Husk in his transcriptions, but he also overlooks at least two separate references within the text. While this may seem of little consequence, the inclusion of two additional references helps to create a more obvious pattern of connection and process of interpretation. For example, O'Shea fails to note an annotation in *Matter and Memory* where Yeats asks, "? P.B. habit memories" (94). This omission is particularly important since only a few pages later he tentatively concludes, "? Habit memory =Husk" ("Annotated *Matter*" 99). O'Shea also misses an additional mention of "C.B" on page 96 and "P.B." on page 103, and I believe misinterprets the notation at the bottom of page 99. O'Shea's transcription reads, "? Habit memory = Husk/ B.F. images bound to us by habit memory" (21). The "B.F." in O'Shea's version is incorrect, since the notation is quite clearly "B.P." I assume that O'Shea made an interpretive choice here since B.F is one of Yeats's common abbreviations and B.P. is not. O'Shea's use of "B.F." suggests that Yeats is referring to *Body of Fate*, but since there is no other mention of *Body of Fate* or the *Faculties* in the text, it seems more likely that Yeats accidently inverted the letters and meant P.B. as another reference to the *Passionate Body*. This seems especially likely given that Yeats

associates the *Passionate Body* with the present and the *Husk* with the past, making his annotation explicitly correlate with Bergson's belief that the present is not a still and measurable moment but a process of becoming through memory.

In addition to Bergson's notion of involuntary habit memory, Yeats also appears to see parallels between his system and Bergson's theory of pure memory, where all the past survives in independent recollections. From *A Vision*, we know that Yeats associates the *Celestial Body* with the timeless and "that the present and the timeless, past and future, are opposite" (*AVB* 141). If the present is represented by the *Passionate Body* and the past by the *Husk*, with both connected to Bergson's habit memory and the physical material body, then logic follows that the *Celestial Body* and the *Spirit* are associated with Bergson's notion of pure or spontaneous memory. In fact, Yeats explicitly connects Bergson's understanding of pure memory with the *Celestial Body* and his concept of the *Record* in the *Thirteenth Cone*. For Bergson, spontaneous memory "first records, in the form of memory-images, all the events of our daily life as they occur in time; it neglects no detail; it leaves to each fact, to each gesture, its place and date" (*Matter* 92). Beside this exact passage in *Matter and Memory*, Yeats writes, "'The Record' perhaps C.B. is pure" (92). The *Record*, for Yeats, exists in the "phaseless sphere" of the thirteenth cone, where

> All things are present as an eternal instant to our *Daimon* (or *Ghostly Self* as it is called, when it inhabits the sphere), but that instant is of necessity unintelligible to all bound to the antimonies. My instructors have therefore followed tradition by substituting for it a *Record* where the images of all past events remain for ever 'thinking the thought and doing the deed.' (*AVB* 142)

This *Record* of undivided memory, is strikingly similar to Bergson's pure memory where all experiences exist at one time in unity but are also individualized into separate, unrepeatable memories. Based on Yeats's annotation here, he is drawing a direct correlation between his ideas and those of Bergson. Although Yeats had already conceived of these ideas before reading Bergson, the *Principle*s were far less developed in the first edition of *A Vision,* and are more directly connected to time and memory in the 1937 version. Therefore, it is difficult to exclude the possibility of Bergson's influence on Yeats's understanding and description of his own system.

This possibility becomes even more probable when we look closely at Yeats's revision process and his subtle shifts in diction. Elements of Bergsonian thought are evident in the revised version of *A Vision,* beginning in "Book I: The Great Wheel" when Yeats is first introducing the details of his system and his guiding image of interlocking gyres. This section is particularly revealing in comparison to its original 1925 version. In the first version of *A Vision,* Yeats uses this section only to describe the wheel. His explanation of the gyres occurs much later in the text under "Part 2: The Geometrical Foundation of the Wheel." This section resembles its later counterpart in many ways, but the language Yeats uses in the revised version is strikingly different and unmistakably Bergsonian. In the earlier version Yeats describes his project in the following way:

> Having the concrete mind of a poet, I am unhappy when I find myself among abstract things, and yet I need them to set my experience in order. I must speak of

> time and space, though as I accept the argument of Berkeley I think of them as abstract creations of the human mind, limits which it has chosen for itself. (*AVA* 104)[25]

In the later version, however, Yeats states that

> our thoughts and emotions have duration and quality, a thought recurs or is habitual, a lecture or a musical composition is measured upon the clock. At the same time pure time and pure space, pure subjectivity and pure objectivity—the plane at the bottom of the cone and the point at its apex—are abstractions or figments of the mind. (*AVB* 52)[26]

This language of "duration" and "pure time," and a description of habit memory is more than a mere casual echo of Bergson, especially given that Yeats refers to Giovanni Gentile in a footnote, acknowledging "that my symbols imply his description of time as a spatialising act" (*AVB* 52). It is unclear why Yeats fails to mention Bergson by name in this section when his thoughts and ideas seem so obviously infused with Bergsonian language; it may be to intentionally distance himself from Bergson since the philosopher's credibility had been recently and severely damaged,[27] or he may have absorbed Bergson's ideas and treated them as his own. Yeats also associated Bergson with the younger generation of writers, and as he grew older, he saw himself as increasingly separate from them—even though these young Bergsonian acolytes were

[25] The editors of the 1925 edition of *A Vision* mention in an endnote that Yeats is incorrectly attributing this argument to Berkeley when it belongs to Immanuel Kant (*AVB* 269n18).
[26] This quotation is interrupted in the text by a diagram of a cone labelled with Time and Subjectivity and a corresponding gyre labelled with Space and Time (*AVB* 52).
[27] See Jimena Canales's *The Physicist & The Philosopher* for a detailed examination of Bergson's failed debate with Einstein on April 6, 1922.

beginning to publically reject his influence.[28] Regardless of the reason for Bergson's official absence in the text, the similarities in diction and concept are too prominent to ignore as mere coincidence, especially when coupled with the archival evidence of Yeats's annotations.

A Packet for Ezra Pound

Henri Bergson's presence in *A Vision* is not limited to Yeats's explicit discussion of time and spatiality; it also exists subtly through the addition of *A Packet for Ezra Pound*. Unlike Yeats's first limited print run of *A Vision* in 1925, the revised edition includes an entirely new opening section, *A Packet for Ezra Pound*, which originally was published separately in August, 1929.[29] In this fragmented section of the text, which includes three additional subsections,[30] Yeats describes Pound as an artist "whose art is the opposite of mine, whose criticism commends what I most condemn" (*AVB* 3). In a text so deeply rooted in antinomies and contrariety, it is significant that Yeats begins by identifying Pound as his obverse. Establishing Pound as an intellectual and creative adversary is further emphasized through Yeats's mention of Wyndham Lewis's recently published *Time and Western Man* (1927) in a footnote, a text which harshly critiques writers like Pound and Joyce and directly aligns them with process philosophers like

[28] By the mid-1920s, many early advocates of Bergsonian philosophy—like Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, and Wyndham Lewis—began to publically critique it. Alexandre Lefebvre describes Bergson's fall from literary grace as the "unhappy experience of being embalmed alive, of being canonized and shelved all at once" (xiii).

[29] Cuala Press published 425 copies of *A Packet for Ezra Pound* in August of 1929, which does differ in some ways from the material included in the 1937 version of *A Vision* (Harper and Paul xxxv).

[30] *A Packet for Ezra Pound* is comprised of three subsections that are further fragmented: "Rapallo," which contains five sections; "Introduction to 'A Vision,'" which contains fifteen sections; and "To Ezra Pound," which contains two sections.

Bergson: "Mr. Wyndham Lewis, whose criticism sounds true to a man of my generation, attacks this art in *Time and Western Man*. If we reject, he argues, the forms and categories of the intellect there is nothing left but sensation, 'eternal flux'" (*AVB* 4). By including Lewis's reference to "eternal flux," Yeats clearly reveals his awareness of Bergsonian philosophy and its relationship with the work of Pound. After all, in *Time and Western Man*, Lewis describes Pound harshly as a "sensationalist half-impresario, half-poet; whose mind can be best arrived at, perhaps, by thinking of what would happen if you could mix in exactly equal proportions Bergson-Marinetti-Mr. Hueffer […] Edward Fitzgerald and Buffalo Bill" (Lewis 38). This direct link between Pound and Bergson is important because it brings Bergson into the conversation of Yeats's text even when he is not mentioned directly.

In addition to this particular section, Yeats frequently aligns himself with Lewis, comparing his own "stylistic arrangements of experience," for example, to "the cubes in the drawing of Wyndham Lewis" in section XV of "Introduction to 'A Vision'" (*AVB* 19). Yeats also notes in a letter to Lady Gregory dated April 1, 1928, that Lewis's *Time and Western Man* "is on my side of things philosophically" (739). Like Lewis, Yeats values form and structure, something he sees as lacking in the work of many of his contemporaries like Pound. The Bergsonian "eternal flux" that Lewis resents so much is inaccurately equated with a lack of form and craft, which is why Yeats agrees with many of Lewis's critiques. Interestingly, however, and in typical Yeatsian fashion, the poet does not explicitly endorse Lewis's reading in this opening section of *A Vision*. Instead of stating that Lewis's criticism "*is true*," he states that it "*sounds true* to a man of his

generation" (*AVB* 4 emphasis added). This slight difference in diction reveals the perpetual slipperiness of Yeats's language—always refusing definitiveness in favor of multivalence.

In fact, the entirety of section II in "Rapallo" participates in this linguistic polysemy. For example, Yeats refers to Pound's *Cantos* as "a poem in which there is nothing that can be taken out and reasoned over, nothing that is not a part of the poem itself" (*AVB* 4). He mocks Pound's strange and difficult system involving "sets of letters that represent emotions or archetypal events […] all set whirling together" (4). The convoluted and seemingly chaotic structure that Yeats critiques in Pound's work ironically echoes his own eccentric and deeply complex system in *A Vision,* which is predicated on the turbulent symbol of two interlocking gyres—a symbol unmistakably invoked in the phrase "whirling together" (4). Yeats also concludes this second section under "Rapallo" by conceding, "I may, now that I have recovered leisure, find that the mathematical structure, when taken up into imagination, is more than mathematical, that seemingly irrelevant details fit together into a single theme, that here is no botch of tone and colour […]" (*AVB* 5). Even though Yeats initially critiques Pound's lack of form, he acknowledges that what appears to be without reason or order may indeed possess it after more careful study. Although Yeats is referring to Pound's text, it is as if he is teaching his audience how to approach *A Vision* by describing his own approach to the *Cantos*. And while it may seem odd to find humor or irony in a text like *A Vision,* it is also

difficult to ignore its presence in moments like these, especially when this same section is accompanied by a quotation from Jonathan Swift.[31]

The fact that Yeats begins a text like *A Vision* by first describing his own creative opposite reveals an additional layer of irony. Rather than beginning this revised edition with a dedication to Vestigia[32] or a fictional narrative by Owen Aherne,[33] Yeats chooses to begin with a real life microcosm of his own system. By describing Pound as his opposite but presenting subtle commonalities in their work, he immediately invokes his own symbol of interlocking and interpenetrating gyres. When read this way, Yeats and Pound can be understood as representing antithetical creative approaches—separate gyres with different poetic priorities, so to speak. By extension, Henri Bergson can be positioned in opposition to Yeats as well since he has already been indirectly aligned with Pound via Wyndham Lewis. The two approaches, however, are not entirely divergent. As Yeats describes Pound's work, he humorously echoes his own, and calls attention to the permeation of ideas that is reminiscent of Bergson's qualitative multiplicity. Yeats's repetitive emphasis on Pound as a member of a separate generation further reinforces this creative schematic. Similar to Yeats's historical system of antithetical epochs represented by the double cone or gyre, he and Pound represent two distinct generations that appear in opposition but actually overlap in interesting and important ways.

Yeats repeatedly emphasizes a generational distance from his artistic contemporaries, one that suggests an anxiety about his place in a shifting literary

[31] Yeats includes a quatrain from Swift's 1719 poem "The Progress of Beauty."
[32] "Vestigia" is the magical name of Mina Bergson, later Moina Mathers, in the Order of the Golden Dawn.
[33] The first edition of *A Vision* (1925) begins after the dedication to Vestigia with an Introduction by Owen Aherne.

landscape. For Yeats, the self-proclaimed "last Romantic," Pound seems to embody this new generation of writers. In fact, in the original 1929 version of *A Packet for Ezra Pound*, section II of "Rapallo" concludes with the following paragraph, excised before publication in *A Vision*:

> It is almost impossible to understand the art of a generation younger than one's own. I was wrong about "Ulysses" when I had read but some first fragments, and I do not want to be wrong again—above all in judging verse. Perhaps when the sudden Italian spring has come I may have discovered what will seem all the more, because opposite of all I have attempted, unique and unforgettable. (*AVB* 310n14)

Yeats clearly sees himself as distinct from writers like Pound and Joyce, even contrary to them since he once again describes them as "opposite," but he is also open to the work that they are producing. He recognizes his own interpretive limitations, and even acknowledges that after careful study or a "sudden Italian spring," he may find in their work something exquisite after all. This interest in paradoxical difference and commonality is expressed again at the end of section III of "Rapallo," when Yeats describes Pound's unusual affinity for feeding stray cats. Yeats asks, "Was this pity a characteristic of his generation that has survived the Romantic Movement, and of mine and hers[34] that saw it die—I too a revolutionist—some drop of hysteria still at the bottom of the cup?" (*AVB* 5-6). Again, Yeats separates himself from Pound because of age, but at the same time he is interested in their similarities. Presented as a question rather than a definitive statement, Yeats ponders whether he, like Pound and Gonne, is a

[34] In this section, Yeats compares Pound's pity to that of Maud Gonne, "the only friend who remains to me from late boyhood, grown gaunt in the injustice of what seems her blind nobility of pity" (*AVB* 5).

"revolutionist." His mention of "hysteria" also calls attention to an uncontrollable and emotional quality in the writing of the younger generation—a quality that Yeats appears to admire and simultaneously distrust.

This chaotic, unbridled quality in the writing of Pound and his peers is also, for Yeats, closely related to the Bergsonian notion of flux. Since Yeats's ideas at least partially align with those of Wyndham Lewis on the subject, we can surmise that the notion of life as constant and unpredictable change is a potential threat to form, intellect, and craft. If we take Yeats at his word, we assume that his system has nothing in common with Bergson's theories. However, a closer look at his annotations of Bergson's work and their relationship with his revised version of *A Vision* reveals a much deeper level of intellectual and philosophical engagement. He both accepts Bergson's theories and resists them. Additionally, if we apply Yeats's own system of contraries to his antithetical relationship with Pound—and by extension Bergson—then we are forced to conclude that these authors of fluidity are not separate from Yeats but are necessary counterpoints to his more ordered structure. After all, Yeats's double gyres do not exist separately; instead, they are "intersecting states struggling one against the other" (*AVB* 52). Although all aspects of Yeats's philosophy in *A Vision* do not neatly align with Bergson's theories, it is important to understand how this deeply intertextual modernist work engages with, overlaps, challenges, and at times rejects Bergsonian philosophy. It is important that we begin to recognize Bergson as a vital thread in the philosophical fabric that comprises *A Vision*.

CHAPTER III

DIALECTIC TENSION IN *THE TOWER* AND *THE WINDING STAIR*

As soon as Yeats completed his first edition of *A Vision* in April 1925, he immediately began working on revisions. According to Yeats, the spiritual Communicators, who dictated many of the ideas set forth in *A Vision* to Yeats's wife George through automatic writing sessions, demanded that he avoid reading philosophy while writing the initial version of his system, and Yeats apparently listened and obeyed.[35] Once he completed *A Vision*, however, he immediately began an intense study of traditional and contemporary philosophy. He read broadly and voraciously, assisted in part by his friend T. Sturge Moore, whose brother, G.E. Moore,[36] was a well-respected analytic philosopher (Brown 312). During this time, Yeats saturated himself in the philosophies of Plato, Plotinus, Berkeley, Croce, Kant, Whitehead, Russell, Spinoza, Gentile, Spengler, and Leibniz. And although it is rarely discussed, the major works of French philosopher Henri Bergson—including *Creative Evolution* and *Matter and Memory*—were also part of Yeats's intellectual and philosophical landscape during the years following the first publication of *A Vision*.

As noted in the previous chapter, *Creative Evolution* and *Matter and Memory* were part of Yeats's personal library and both books bear substantial marginal annotation by Yeats. These annotations reveal that Yeats saw connections between Bergson's

[35] See section V of "Introduction to 'A Vision'" in *A Packet for Ezra Pound* (*AVB* 10).
[36] Terence Brown notes that G.E. Moore was an anti-idealist philosopher like Bertrand Russell, who Yeats frequently disagreed with (312).

theories and his own system in *A Vision*; many of the notes refer to *A Vision* directly or specific aspects of his system like the *Four Principles*, the *Record*, and the *Daimon*. Although Yeats does resist Bergson's ideas at times, especially regarding how images are recalled in dreams, overall, his notations reveal a committed engagement with Bergsonian philosophy and a desire to find points of connection between it and his own esoteric system. While the previous chapter looked closely at many of the marginal annotations that relate explicitly to the revised version of *A Vision* and Yeats's broader philosophical system, this chapter focuses on how Bergson's ideas find their way into Yeats's post-*Vision* poetry, specifically *The Tower* (1928) and *The Winding Stair* (1933)—two collections written at the same time that Yeats was revising and refining *A Vision*. As Margaret Mills Harper and Catherine Paul note in their exemplary Introduction to the 1937 edition of *A Vision*, Yeats's consumption of philosophy was concentrated from 1926 to 1927 (xxvi).

Based on clues from Yeats's annotations in his personal copies of *Matter and Memory* and *Creative Evolution*, it appears that he probably read Bergson's work sometime between late April and June of 1926. Inside the back cover of Yeats's personal copy of Bergson's *Matter and Memory*, for example, is a list of the following words:

> Byzantium
> Tower
> The man's love
> The woman's love
> Convent school
> Christ
> Sermon on Mount

These quick notes refer to poems found in *The Tower* and *The Winding Stair*, but since they are not exact titles, we can speculate that these annotations came before many of the poems had reached their final form. One of the most revealing examples is "Among School Children," described in *Matter and Memory* as "Convent School." The poem was clearly inspired by Yeats's Senatorial visit to the progressive Montessori school, St. Otteran's, run by the Catholic Sisters of Mercy in Waterford on March 22, 1926. And based on Yeats's letters and manuscript materials, we know that he first conceived of the poem in March of 1926,[37] only a few days after his visit (*The Tower (1928)* 361). The poem did not gain its current title, however, until much later in 1926.[38]

Since Yeats refers to the poem as "Convent School" rather than "Among School Children," it seems that this notation could have come very early in Yeats's conceptualization of the poem. Yeats also includes references to Whitehead's work in his annotations of Bergson, and a letter to Olivia Shakespear, dated April 22, 1926, reveals that he was reading and enjoying Whitehead's work at that time (714). In his letter he describes him as "all 'Spirit' whereas I am all 'Passionate Body'" and then states, "He is the opposite of Bertrand Russell who fills me with fury, by his plebian loquacity" (714). T. Sturge Moore also mentions Bergson in the company of Croce, Gentile, Whitehead, and Russell in a letter to Yeats on June 18, 1926, so we can infer that Yeats has already read Bergson by the time of this correspondence (97).

[37] A notebook entry from March 1926 includes Yeats's burgeoning idea for "Among School Children": "Topic for poem—School Children &/ the thought that life will waste them" (*The Tower (1928)* 361)
[38] A draft from June 14, 1926 does not include a title (*The Tower (1928)* 375).

The relative specificity of Yeats's reading of Bergson's texts is important because it helps to provide an additional, useful layer of philosophical context when looking at the textual genesis of poems found in *The Tower* and *The Winding Stair*. These two modernist volumes of poetry are closely intertwined with one another and with Yeats's system from *A Vision*, and in both volumes, Yeats engages in a dialogic relationship with Bergsonian philosophy—sometimes subtly and sometimes more directly. Even though the poems in these volumes push against Bergsonian theory at times, Bergson's ideas remain part of Yeats philosophical scaffolding during the composition process, and the poet's preoccupation with themes of timelessness versus the lived experience of time—and with the role of the past and memory in shaping the present and future—disclose a more thoughtful and invested relationship with Bergsonian ideas than Yeats's direct statements about Bergson might imply.

Like Ezra Pound in *A Vision*, Bergson becomes a necessary counterpoint for Yeats in these two volumes of poetry. Bergson's theories of memory and *durée* always privilege movement and multiplicity and propose a worldview that is fluid, unpredictable, and in flux—a worldview that partially unsettles Yeats's desire for order, control, and form. However, Bergson's theories also value the past and the active role that the past and memory play in shaping our present and future. Just as in *A Vision*, there is order and control on one hand but it is always undergirded by dilation, movement, and process. That tension established in *A Vision* continues within and between these two volumes and exists at the structural, thematic, and stylistic level.

Yeats and Bergson are rarely discussed together, perhaps because Yeats does not credit Bergson as a direct influence on his work, choosing instead to distance himself from the philosopher and those authors who were, and are, frequently associated with his ideas—authors like Joyce, Pound, Stein, and even Woolf. Yeats sees himself as part of a different generation and a different aesthetic, and he is, therefore, reluctant to align himself with Bergsonian ideas, even though many of his philosophies run parallel and at times overlap with Yeats's system. For example, when writing to Olivia Shakespear on March 24, 1927 about his struggles with philosophy, Yeats mentions that he has been reading Wyndham Lewis's essay the *Enemy*, and declares that he finds "his proof that the popularity of Charlie Chaplin has been caused by the spread of Bergson's philosophy the most stirring thought I have met this long time" (723). He goes on to humorously ask, "But what will Ezra do? Will he 'pass by in silent dignity' as we were told to do in childhood or will he fill his pockets with all necessary missiles and rush to the defence of Joyce, Picasso, Miss Stein and all the gods?" (723). Yeats's defensive cynicism towards the high modernists—including his close friend Ezra Pound—is palpable in this statement, and it is clear that he associates Bergson with this particular evolving vein of modernism. There is also a slight twinge of jealousy, perhaps, when he ironically refers to his younger contemporaries as "gods," recognizing that the direction of contemporary literature and art is moving towards Joyce and Picasso and away from him.

Years later, in a letter to Shakespear on August 2, 1931, Yeats describes his younger contemporaries by declaring, "It is the generation of Bergson. I am full of admiration and respect, but I hate the Jewish element in Bergson, the deification of the

moment, that for minds less hard and masculine than Gaudier's turned the world into fruit-salad" (728). This key criticism of Bergson is problematic for a number of reasons. Not only does it expose Yeats's growing anti-Semitism, it also inaccurately reduces Bergsonian philosophy to a system that only privileges the present, lacking unity or form—resulting in a chaotic muddle of fragmentation that Yeats rather humorously labels "fruit-salad." If these limited comments about Bergson are considered alone, then one would assume that Yeats disagrees with the popular philosopher on all fronts. However, when read in conjunction with Yeats's annotated copies of Bergson's work and the poetry and prose produced soon after that reading, Yeats's relationship with Bergsonian theory becomes increasingly more complicated and engaging.

The Tower

As one would expect, the poems written after Yeats completed the first version of *A Vision* are inundated with symbols and theories from his complex and deeply intertextual mystical system, including his dominant symbol of the interlocking gyres. The poems of *The Tower* (1928) represent an interesting shift in Yeats's work. There are earlier glimpses in poems like "Easter 1916" and "The Second Coming," but as a collection, *The Tower* represents a refined Yeatsian aesthetic rooted in conflict and tension. Having by this time witnessed the devastation of WWI, the Irish War for Independence, and the subsequent Civil War, Yeats was faced with a rather bleak reality of destruction and decay. Additionally, the aging poet was beginning to experience

serious health concerns,[39] and so much of this volume reflects the bitter paradox of an artist whose body is declining just as his creativity and passions are intensifying. Theodore Ziolkowski argues that at this time Yeats begins to see tradition "as a bulwark against what many writers and thinkers regarded as the anarchy loosed upon the world as a result of spiritual, intellectual, and political upheavals of the early twentieth century" (xi-xii), noting that this is why Yeats literally retreats to the tower of Thoor Ballylee,[40] to escape urbanity and technology and ground himself in "a symbol of the past" (xi-xiii). According to Ziolkowski, Yeats was deeply taken with Shelley's idea of the philosopher in the tower and came to regard "towers as an easily recognizable literary image for the retreat of poets and thinkers" (50). And although the image—and the actual tower—represents tradition and constancy, Yeats transforms it into a complex and dynamic modernist symbol with multiple levels of signification.

In an anonymous review of *The Tower* for *The Nation & Athenaeum* on April 21, 1928, Virginia Woolf remarks, "The poems are difficult, not through obscurity of language, but because the thought lies deep and turns strangely" ("Mr Yeats" 545). She goes on to praise the seasoned artist, remarking that he is an even stronger poet in his maturity than he was in his youth since the "years seem to have dried up the Celtic mists" ("Mr Yeats" 545). Woolf perfectly encapsulates the version of modernism represented in *The Tower*, in which content and language are in tension with form and style. As Yeats's

[39] Terence Brown notes in his critical biography, *The Life of W.B. Yeats*, that by the winter of 1924, the poet was beginning to feel the impact of aging, including vision and hearing problems, "shortness of breath," high blood pressure, and a weakened heart and lungs (298).
[40] Yeats purchased Ballylee Castle in 1919, renaming it Thoor Ballylee. In a letter to Olivia Shakespear in April of 1922, Yeats notes that "Thoor is Irish for tower and it will keep people from suspecting us of modern gothic and a deer park. I think the harsh sound of 'Thoor' amends the softness of the rest" (680).

diction expands into a more modern lexicon, and his themes and ideas become less romantic and more complex, his style and structure actually contracts and tightens. Always attentive to form, he refuses to abandon all modes of order and control in his work. He explores the chaos and destruction of the encroaching antithetical age, but he does so while grounded in tradition. His interlocking and interpenetrating gyres, representing the contrasting tension of the primary and antithetical tinctures, are at work in everything he composes, and their presence remarkably is not limited to theme; it permeates each poem's structure and style as well as the entire volume's arrangement. As Yeats gains maturity as a poet, his work becomes increasingly more modern, but unlike many of his contemporaries, his form does not. Yeats always maintains a counterpoint in his work, a tension between order and fluidity, which is why incredibly modernist poems like "Sailing to Byzantium" and "Among School Children" are curiously presented in *ottava rima*, the traditional form for epic poetry. By maintaining control over form, Yeats is able to expand in other directions, preserving a thematic and stylistic tension between the primary and antithetical forces that drive his work.

Beginning with "Sailing to Byzantium," the opening poem in *The Tower*, Yeats introduces one of his primary themes for the volume—the bitterness of aging and the desire for an imaginative retreat from the physical body and its encroaching limitations. As mentioned earlier, inside the back cover of his personal copy of Bergson's *Matter and Memory*, Yeats includes a list of poem titles or themes, and the first one listed is "Byzantium." Given that Yeats is most likely reading Bergson's work in the late spring

or summer of 1926, he is likely referring to what will become "Sailing to Byzantium" rather than his later poem "Byzantium"—though the later poem certainly has overlapping origins with its earlier companion piece.[41]

The manuscript drafts of "Sailing to Byzantium," originally titled "Towards Byzantium,"[42] provide an interesting look at Yeats's composition and revision process, particularly his emphasis on the representation of time in the final line of the poem. Like many of Yeats's poems, "Sailing to Byzantium" went through an extensive number of drafts and revisions, and in the original pencil draft of the poem, what eventually becomes the final line is presented as "Of present past & future & to come" (*The Tower (1928)* 21). The construction of this original line is intriguing because it privileges the present moment by ignoring chronology and placing it first, and it suggests that "the future" and what is "to come" require separate categorizations. The second typescript draft—dated Sept. 26, 1926—however, changes the line to the more familiar, "Of what is past or passing or to come" (*The Tower (1928)* 33). A third draft of the poem rearranges the order but reverts to the earlier version that includes the use of the present: "Of that is past or present or to come" (45). Although this shift in diction and syntax could be seen as the poet merely playing with rhythm and tone, Yeats's recent immersion in philosophical discussions of time adds vital layers of context and significance to an otherwise simple revision.

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[41] For example, the manuscript materials for "Sailing to Byzantium" include numerous references to the image of the dolphin, which is absent from the final version of "Sailing to Byzantium" but appears in the later poem "Byzantium"—a poem not drafted until April 30, 1930.

[42] Four separate drafts of "Sailing to Byzantium" are provided in *The Tower (1928): Manuscript Materials* (2-49). Only the final page proofs draft, with corrections in ink, includes the title "Sailing to Byzantium." The earliest draft in pencil does not include a title, but the next two drafts are titled "Towards Byzantium."

What is most intriguing about these alterations is the author's ambivalence about how to represent the present moment. Based on the third draft, Yeats chooses to arrange the sentence in the expected chronology of past, present, and future. The fourth and final published version of the line maintains this order but mirrors the second draft with added punctuation: "Of what is past, or passing, or to come" (49). Yeats's decision to depict time in this particular way, where the past "is" but the present is only "passing," gestures towards a Bergsonian influence that conceptualizes the present moment not as a static and delineated measureable instant, but as an active process of becoming—one dependent on the past. As Andrew Lepecki notes, "for Bergson, all that is present is becoming, only the past *is*" (129). By referring to the present as that which is "passing," Yeats echoes specific points in Bergson's *Matter and Memory*—details which would have been fresh in his mind at the time of the poem's composition. In fact, based on Yeats's extensive annotations, we can say without speculation that he was familiar with the following passage in *Matter and Memory*—a passage which outlines Bergson's conception of the present—having underlined part of it in his personal copy of the text:[43]

> You define the present in an arbitrary manner as *that which* is, whereas the present is simply *what is being made*. […] When we think this present as going to be, it exists not yet; and when we think it as existing, it is already past. […] *Practically we perceive only the past,* the pure present being the invisible progress of the past gnawing into the future. (193-194)

[43] Page 193 in *Matter and Memory* is heavily marked by Yeats, and one of the many underlined passages includes, "the present is simply *what is being made*." On the following page Yeats also marks a line in the margin next to the passage beginning, "Practically we perceive only the past …."

Clearly, these passages stood out to Yeats while reading Bergson's work, and his depiction of the temporal present and the future in "Sailing to Byzantium" as dynamic and transitory processes rather than stable moments exposes how Bergsonian ideas subtly found their way into Yeats's new philosophical worldview.

As a whole, "Sailing to Byzantium," also reveals a fascinating engagement with Bergsonian concepts of temporality by pushing back against the uncontrollable flux of lived experience through an imaginative escape to the idealized and eternal land of Byzantium. Byzantium as a location and a historical period is vaguely spatial and temporal while also escaping both. It is an imagined retreat for the speaker of the poem where his soul and body can be separate—where his spirit is no longer "fastened to a dying animal" (line 22). Elated that he has escaped a country where "Whatever is begotten, born, and dies," the speaker imagines himself gathered "Into the artifice of eternity" (24) and turned into a beautiful bird "Of hammered gold and gold enamelling" (28). Unlike the birds in the first stanza, however, the speaker is no longer part of the "dying generations" (3). He is an immortal work of art, and yet he curiously sings from his golden bough "Of what is past, or passing, or to come" (32). Although the poem in some ways rejects a Bergsonian view of time as a continuous process of becoming, it also maintains the tension between the lived experience of time and the desire for timelessness. While the speaker yearns for a world exclusively of the soul and leaves behind both the sensuous and decaying body, once he achieves this artificial immortality, he ironically sings about the passing of time.

Even though the poem expresses an acceptance of Bergson's view of the present as a process, Yeats is unable to fully embrace Bergsonian *durée*. Adopting a more Kantian view of freedom achieved outside of time and space, the speaker of the poem, who becomes the golden bird, observes the flux of time from a safe and peripheral distance. For Bergson, the freedom of *durée*, or real time, is only achieved through intuition and through an internal experience rather than an external observation. Based on Yeats's annotations in *Matter and Memory*, it is clear that he struggled with some of Bergson's conclusions, especially his understanding of freedom. Even though Yeats writes "antithetical & primary" (O'Shea 23) in the margin beside Bergson's declaration that "the distinction between body and mind must be established in terms not of space but of time" (*Matter* 294), he also seems to value the freedom of Leibnizian monads above Bergsonian *durée*. While the majority of Yeats's notes in *Matter and Memory* expose connections and overlaps between Bergson's ideas and Yeats's personal evolving philosophy in *A Vision*, the final pages of the text include annotations that resist Bergson in defense of Leibniz. For example, at the end of the final chapter, before the "Summary and Conclusion," Yeats includes a long marginal note that reveals his struggle with Bergson:

> A state of existence which all confines. This nature would be free and without change. There would be no code and no change, no limit and so no compulsion. Bergson confines freedom to constancy of creation—to partial freedom. That is, he sees "the intelligible" not as Leibnitz, a free monad, but as world of "pure perception" where all is bound to all. This "pure perception" is a consciousness which neutralizes itself. This I do not understand. He does not explain "neutralizes" in this book. We are in the present "pure perception," also in past and future. May it not be that we forget? (O'Shea 23)

According to the seventeenth-century German philosopher Gottfried Leibniz, space and time are illusions and the substance of the universe consists of simple, immaterial soul-like entities described as monads. In Leibnizian theory, all monads are self-sufficient, independent, and free. There is no inherent causal relationship between them, but God has created a pre-established harmony. By choosing the eternal timelessness of Byzantium, the speaker of the poem appears to be embracing Leibniz's unique version of determinism; however, the final line of the poem acknowledges the reality of a Bergsonian worldview.

In "The Tower," which immediately follows "Sailing to Byzantium" in the volume, Yeats continues to engage with questions of time, once again looking at the past and its complex relationship to the present. Beginning with another image of the aging body, Yeats calls attention to age and the passing of time by treating it as a separate entity. Like the "tattered coat upon a stick" or the "dying animal" from "Sailing to Byzantium," age is once again something that is fastened to the poet. He feels removed from it, as if the physical body and his internal self are entirely separate identities:

> What shall I do with this absurdity—
> O heart, O troubled heart—this caricature,
> Decrepit age that has been tied to me
> As to a dog's tail? (lines 1-4)

This obsession with aging and its physical limitations, which for Yeats do not correspond to creativity or desire, dominates this volume of poetry and contributes to the poet's exploration of the role of the past in creating the present. Already, Yeats is thinking in Bergsonian terms about measured time versus the lived experience of time and finding

that the two are not equivalent. By describing the ageing body as a separate thing that is attached to him, Yeats symbolically spatializes the passing of time. For Bergson, numbers and sums are images that conveniently, though inaccurately, allow us to convey time by spatializing it rather than experiencing real time through intuition. In this opening section of "The Tower," Yeats pushes that spatialization one step further by separating himself and his experience of time from his physical body. Age, and the passing of time, is not an internal experience; instead, it is a separate self, an "absurdity" (1) and a "caricature" (2). Like Bergson, the spatialized experience of time is not real for Yeats and does not represent him. It is only a ridiculous imitation of himself. Even though he is an aging poet—whose physical body is beginning to fail him—the speaker of the poem notes that he has never felt more "Excited, passionate, fantastical" (5). There is a disconnect between the spatialized delineation of time and aging and his lived experience of that process.

In an effort to escape the "[d]ecrepit age" of the present, the poet retreats to the perceived security of the tower—a physical monument of safety, continuity, and strength (3). Similar to the imagined retreat in "Sailing to Byzantium," this withdrawal also escapes to the past, but unlike Byzantium, it is a real and immediate past—a physical relic of the past existing into the present. Yeats, of course, owned an actual tower, Thoor Ballylee, which he purchased in 1916 and restored before moving into it in 1919. Since Yeats moved to Ballylee at a time of intense political unrest,[44] it is easy to see the remote tower as the poet's way of escaping the modern world—a dangerous and unpredictable

[44] In 1919, Ireland was in the middle of the Irish War for Independence, and WWI was just concluding.

world of strife and chaos. Typically seen by scholars as a representation of Yeats's antithetical tincture, the tower is associated with masculine strength and violence. Ezra Pound even mockingly referred to Yeats's home as that "phallic symbol on the Bogs. Ballyphallus or whatever he calls it with the river on the first floor," noting the obvious and almost comic hypermasculinity of the symbol (qtd. in Ziolkowski 49). Although the image of the tower and its symbolic connotations certainly call to mind the masculine rather than the feminine—which Yeats associates with the antithetical—the poet's use of the tower is strikingly more complex. In addition to turbulence and violence, it also represents tradition and constancy, a kind of order that is more indicative of the primary than the antithetical. This symbol reveals, once again, Yeats's obsession with the tension between order and discord.

Bergsonian notions of the past are also present in the poem as the speaker begins to pace the battlements of the tower, faced with the inconsistency of his failing body and his generative, creative mind. He looks to "the foundations of a house" (18) and the trees rooted in the earth and summons "Images and memories" (22) in order to ask them if they also "… rage/ As I do now against old age?" (99-100). Although Yeats's invocation of the past is not particularly Bergsonian—since Bergson argued that memories are not retrieved but rather push their way into the present when they are most needed—Yeats's treatment of the past and its role in shaping the present does overlap and engage with Bergson's philosophy.

Despite the fact that Yeats is summoning memories, his representation of the past is intriguing because it moves through time but not space. Never leaving the foundation of

the tower, the speaker recalls a patchwork of events that occurred there throughout history. Both real and created, the memories are not Yeats's personal memories but belong instead to "the Great Memory" ("The Tower" 85). Yeats's Great Memory is similar to Jung's collective unconscious and parallels Bergson's belief in the perpetual existence of all past experiences in the present. Yeats even emphasizes the relationship between Bergson's theories and his concept of the *Record* in his annotations of *Matter and Memory*. Writing "The Record" in the margin next to Bergson's description of the function of memory (O'Shea 21), Yeats makes a connection between his own idea of the *Recor*d, "where the images of all past events remain for ever 'thinking the thought and doing the deed'" (*AVB* 142), and Bergson's belief that one form of memory records "in the form of memory-images, all the events of our daily life as they occur in time; it neglects no detail; it leaves to each fact , to each gesture, its place and date […] it stores up the past by the mere necessity of its own nature" (*Matter* 92). For both Yeats and Bergson, past experiences and memories are ever present and an individual has the potential to access other people's memories as well as their own.

This correlation is particularly evident in section II of "The Tower" when Yeats describes a time when,

> Rough men-at-arms, cross gartered to the knees
> Or shod in iron, climbed the narrow stairs
> And certain men-at-arms there were
> Whose images, in the Great Memory stored,
> Come with loud cry and panting breast
> To break upon a sleeper's rest
> While their great wooden dice beat on the board. (82-88)

Yeats, of course, is not remembering this experience first-hand; it is an experience recorded in the Great Memory and one that is forcefully pushing its way into the present through a dream. Yeats's portrayal of an ancient Irish past, continually existing in a shared memory and breaching the present moment, is remarkably similar in conception to Bergson's understanding of pure memory:

> Memory images cannot be lodged in the brain because Pure Memory is virtual! Memory does not exist until it is actualized through interaction with perception, or in the mode of dream. […] Memory does not proceed from the present into the past. It proceeds from the past into the present, by actualizing itself. (Guerlac 139-140)

Even though the speaker of the poem is attempting to control the situation and call these individuals into the present moment so he can ask them his question, passages like the one above suggest that he is not entirely in control of those memories. He may be invoking the past from the present, but the present is not stable or fixed; it is created through this exchange with, and actualization of, past experiences. In this dramatization, Yeats's notion of memory is strikingly parallel to Bergson's, and while his concept of the Great Memory existed prior to his reading of Bergson's work, notations like "?undivided memory = record," found in his copy of *Matter and Memory* (O'Shea 22), allow us to speculate with confidence that Bergsonian theory is one thread in the philosophical fabric of Yeats's system—a system woven throughout *The Tower*.

The Winding Stair and Other Poems

Yeats's engagement with Bergsonian theory, however, does not end with the poems of *The Tower*; his next full volume *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1933) is

also preoccupied with Bergsonian issues of time, memory, and change. In fact, Yeats composed many of the poems from this collection at the same time that he completed *The Tower*. *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* was published in 1933, but it is actually a combination of two smaller volumes: *The Winding Stair*, published soon after *The Tower* in 1929, and *Words for Music Perhaps and Other Poems*, published in 1932.[45] Once again turning to Yeats's annotations in *Matter and Memory*, we can see that the two volumes evolved simultaneously. Yeats's notes in the back cover of the book not only refer to poems like "Sailing to Byzantium," "The Tower," and "Among School Children"; they also include "The man's love" and "The woman's love," as well as the simple note "Christ" (O'Shea 24). While the rather vague mention of "Christ" can refer to a number of poems from *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*, including "The Mother of God," the note about "The man's love" and "The woman's love" specifically refers to what becomes "A Man Young and Old" in *The Tower* and "A Woman Young and Old" in *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*. This notation in *Matter and Memory*, therefore, reveals that Yeats was thinking about these two volumes as a dualistic pair from the very beginning and that each volume was, in some way, connected to his reading of Bergson. The manuscripts we have of Yeats's drafts confirm this assumption since we find an early pencil draft of "Her Vision in the Wood" on a verso page of "Among School Children" (*The Tower (1928)* 373n1).[46]

[45] The 1929 version of *The Winding Stair* included only six poems and was published in the United States by Fountain Press. *Words for Music Perhaps and Other Poems* was published by The Cuala Press in Dublin. For more information about the differences between these two volumes, see David R. Clark's Introduction to *The Winding Stair (1929) Manuscript Materials*.

[46] "Her Vision in the Wood" is the eighth poem in the eleven poem series "A Woman Young and Old."

The connectedness of these volumes also goes beyond the timing of their composition. After the publication of the revised version of *A Vision* in 1937, Yeats wrote to Edmund Dulac and confessed, "I do not know what my book will be to others—nothing perhaps. To me it means a last act of defense against the chaos of the world; & I hope for ten years to write out of my renewed security" (qtd. in Ellmann 294). Yeats's system in *A Vision* dominated much of his thinking from its origins in 1917 until the end of his long career, and although the intricacies of the system are complex and nuanced, at its core it is an arrangement built on the tension of antimonies. These contraries are visually and symbolically represented through the image of the two interpenetrating gyres of the primary and antithetical tinctures: the "*primary* dispensation looking beyond itself towards a transcendent power is dogmatic, levelling, unifying, feminine, humane, peace its means and end," while the "*antithetical* dispensation obeys imminent power, is expressive, hierarchical, multiple, masculine, harsh, surgical" (*AVB* 192).

These ideas of a primary and antithetical force permeate *The Tower* and *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*, with each volume representing a different tincture: *The Tower* is closely aligned with the antithetical while *The Winding Stair* embodies the primary. Paradoxically, and in typical Yeatsian fashion, the antithetical volume *The Tower* includes poems that resist Bergsonian flux for order and timelessness, while many of the poems from its primary companion volume *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* invite fluidity and chaos. Informed by Yeats's evolving philosophical system, *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*, like *The Tower*, reveals a thoughtful engagement with Bergsonian theories regarding time and memory. The volume presents a rhetorical

tension between a nostalgic lament for the order and unity of the past and a sublime anticipation for the new coming antithetical age of chaos and individuation. The uncomfortable fluidity and flux that Yeats's speakers resist in *The Tower* now possesses an intriguing potentiality. This tension and oscillation is reflected not only in the gyre-like image of the winding stair but within the structural arrangement of individual poems and the volume as a whole.

For Yeats's system, the symbol of the winding stair serves as the perfect primary counterpoint to the antithetical force and structure of the tower. The circular, spiraling staircase is not only visually opposed to the rectangular tower of Thoor Ballylee, but it is also an image that—like the tower—is symbolically complex. The tower is a particularly potent image in Ireland because "towers of various origins are part of the landscape and constitute a history of invasions" (Bradley 104). It is a symbol of protection and authority, something that represents strength and generational continuity, and yet it is also a distinctly manmade creation resulting from violence and incursion. The winding stair at first seems to be the perfect visual antithesis of the tower, and yet it is essential to note that the staircase is not separate from the tower; it is an integral part of the tower's structure and stability. This is significant because it visually underscores Yeats's belief that "human life is impossible without strife between the *tinctures*" (*AVB* 59). The antithetical tower and the primary staircase, although visually opposed, represent this necessary dialectic.

Like the tower, the winding stair, as an image, is far from simplistic or one dimensional. As Hazard Adams notes, the figure of the winding stair "seems to imply

both ascent/descent and a gyring oscillation from one side to another" (179). This gyring motion echoes the objective and subjective cones in Yeats's *A Vision*, which implies a necessary tension between opposites. This, coupled with the spatial duality of a spiraling ascent and descent, accentuates a Bergsonian double movement rather than mere linear progress, and as Adams suggests, "These movements become themata that dominate the way the poems are ordered," creating a volume of poetry that "emphasizes relations of opposition between poems or groups of poems" (179).

A number of critics, in addition to Adams, have noted a similar attention to structure in the volume, so my argument focuses on poems that typically garner less critical attention within this structure of rhetorical oscillation and suggests new pairings of poems that further evince this tension. Due to this narrowed scope, I intentionally avoid discussing relevant key texts that are commonly anthologized like "A Dialogue of Self and Soul" and "Vacillation." Choosing instead to focus on poems like "In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markievicz," "The Crazed Moon," and "The Nineteenth Century and After" draws attention to the intricacies of the volume's architecture as well as the multiple levels of symbolic complexity that echo an engagement with Bergsonian flux.

Beginning *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* with "In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markievicz," Yeats sets an elegiac tone for the volume—looking to an earlier period at a critical moment of historical and literary transformation. Unlike "Sailing to Byzantium," which begins *The Tower* with an imagined retreat into a timeless and ideal land, Yeats begins *The Winding Stair* with a deeply personal look to his past.

Like the beginning poem of *The Tower*, however, this opening poem also establishes key features of the entire collection: it centralizes the lives and experiences of women rather than men, and it dramatizes a tension between destructive loss and the sublime anticipation of what might follow. Written in September of 1927 shortly after the deaths of his childhood friends Eva Gore-Booth and her sister Constance Markievicz,[47] the poem begins with the speaker nostalgically recalling the beauty of their youth, describing the women as "Two girls in silk kimonos, both / Beautiful, one a gazelle" (lines 3-4). Markievicz was a major for the Irish Citizen Army during the Easter Rising of 1916 and Gore-Booth was a leading suffragist who fought for the rights of women and the poor, so the poet's choice to describe these prominent political and social activists as "girls" reveals his desperate desire to retreat into an idealized innocent past that predates the violence of World War I, The Irish War for Independence, and the subsequent Civil War. C.L. Innes accurately points out that the poet's reductive description of Markievicz as one who "drags out lonely years / Conspiring among the ignorant" (8-9) and her younger sister Eva as a dreamer of "Some vague Utopia" (11) not only trivializes each woman's cultural contribution but presents the poem as "an elegy which counterposes an aesthetic vision of a past social and political order with rhetoric and imagery of anarchy and disorder" (95).

Even the first line of the poem, "The light of evening, Lissadell" places the poet in a stable and rooted past—at the childhood home of Eva and Con—dramatizing Yeats's desire to return to a time of "light" and order (1). The original opening line of the poem

[47] Eva Gore-Booth died on June 30, 1926, and her older sister Constance Markievicz died on July 15, 1927.

strikes a much different tonal note, beginning not in the comforts of the past but in a corrupted present where "Ireland is a hag" (*The Winding Stair (1929)* 3). This original opening is a deeply charged political statement that taps into the *aisling* tradition in Irish literature[48] and echoes Yeats's early play *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, where the nation of Ireland is depicted as a wandering old woman transformed into a young girl with the "walk of a queen" by the blood sacrifice of Irish young men willing to fight and die for their nation (95). Yeats's original choice, however, leaves Ireland untransformed, not Cathleen but a "hag" who bears more resemblance to Joyce's old gummy granny. By choosing to revise this opening line to begin not in the chaotic and uncontrollable present but in the ordered and constructed past, Yeats establishes a different dramatic arch for the poem.

Lissadell, "that old Georgian mansion" (16), reminds the poet of his youth, before violence and politics robbed these women of their beauty and left them "withered old and skeleton-gaunt" (12). Although the male poet's critical assessment of these two prominent political women is deeply problematic and reductive, it does reveal a speaker who is "celebrating and lamenting beauty and innocence in face of the ravages of time and experience" (Innes 95). The poet wants to remember his friends as they were, or as he chooses to remember them, and the first long stanza reifies this longing when the speaker repeats the phrase, "Two girls in silk kimonos, both / Beautiful, one a gazelle" (19-20). Rather than wanting to escape time to a place like Byzantium, the speaker in this poem seeks to go back in time to a more personal, but still idealized past—a past that is

[48] For a detailed explanation of the *aisling* tradition in Irish Literature, see C.L. Innes's *Woman and Nation in Irish Literature and Society, 1880—1935.*

ordered, recognizable, and uncorrupted. The opening of this poem, once again, reveals Yeats's desperate need to shape and control, to push against the ravages and flux of time. In fact, he is even reshaping the fates of his friends since he believes that violence and chaos have destroyed the beauty they once possessed.

The second stanza of the poem, however, presents a dramatic shift in tone and voice. Beginning with the invocation "Dear shadows, now you know it all," this second half of the poem is no longer passively reflective (21). The speaker now demands the shadows to "Arise and bid me strike a match / And strike another till time catch" (26-7). He threatens to burn the "great gazebo" (29), but this destruction through fire takes on multiple allusive meanings. In one sense, Yeats is possibly recalling the numerous aristocratic homes that were burnt and destroyed by the violence of the IRA during the war (Allison, "Yeats and Politics" 199). However, as Jonathan Allison points out, the speaker's "proposal to strike a match […] gestures towards ritualistic cremation, as though lighting a funeral pyre" ("Yeats and Politics" 199). In this way, the destructive fire can be seen as a necessary catalyst for transformation and a willing embrace of change and disorder. Although Yeats is still struggling to accept Bergsonian theories of time and change, he is beginning to flirt with these notions of instability.

Yeats's willingness to embrace Bergsonian flux in the coming antithetical age is most likely linked to a Burkean understanding of the sublime. With a renewed interest in eighteenth-century writers like Edmund Burke—mentioned by name in "Blood and the Moon"—Yeats was aware that Burke's definition of the sublime experience was not rooted in pleasure and beauty, but in pain and terror because it produces "the strongest

emotion which the mind is capable of feeling" (Burke 82). Jefferson Holdridge uses the term "positive sublime" to describe Yeats's complex relationship to violence and destruction because it embodies both a Burkean and Kantian view of sublimity that emphasizes survival and transcendence ("Heart's Victim" 111-12). Knowing Yeats's belief in the inevitability of historical cycles and spiritual reincarnation, the poet's relationship to violent destruction shifts from a nihilistic or apocalyptic view of conclusion to a sublime anticipation of what is to come. Yeats even said himself that "profound philosophy must come from terror" (qtd. in Holdridge, "Heart's Victim" 111). Although the speaker still maintains control by choosing to be the one who will light the match, he also exposes an openness to chaos. He entertains the possibility that his ordered and controlled past may be an illusion, and he moves closer to a Bergsonian world-view that embraces unity through division.

By facing, and perhaps even inviting, the terror of the new coming age through the repetition of the imperative phrase "bid me," the poet is able to become an active agent in this process of literary and cultural change. According to David Bromwich, "A dream of destruction was part of the dream of [Yeats's] poetry, and it was his luck as a poet to live in an age where so much was destroyed. His task was at once to mourn and to watch" (108). Although I disagree with Bromwich's assumption that Yeats's interest in destruction was somehow innate or disconnected from his cultural lived experience, his view of Yeats as a mourner and an observer seems appropriate. Both roles are present in "In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markievicz," and yet the poem also reveals a speaker who is willing to take action, willing to initiate this destruction and welcome this

coming age with "resignation, if not mounting ecstasy" (Allison, "Yeats and Politics" 200). This willingness certainly invokes a Nietzschean "belief in the inevitability of cultural disaster and the desirability of helping it along in order that something better will be created out the wreckage" (Bradley 105). It also echoes Bergson's belief in perpetual change, perhaps even unintentionally alluding to his theory of *élan vital*, the vital spark that fuels creativity and temporal flow. This opening poem in the collection immediately draws attention to Yeats's profound emphasis on tension. While the first stanza of the poem laments a fleeting age of innocence and beauty, the second stanza acknowledges and beckons an encroaching destructive force; the poem as a whole structurally and thematically enacts the near constant vacillation of the symbolic winding stair.

A similar vacillation can also be seen at the structural level of the volume through the pairing of the two poems "Coole Park, 1929" and "Coole and Ballylee, 1931." In "Coole Park, 1929," Yeats once again grounds the poem in both place and time, echoing a nostalgia similar to what was seen in "In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markievicz," but this time focusing on his friend and fellow artist Lady Augusta Gregory and her ancestral home at Coole Park in County Galway. Like Eva and Con, Lady Gregory and her home at Coole represent an aristocratic, ordered past of comfort and familiarity. The house at Coole Park was not only a place that Yeats visited for two to three months of every year for over twenty years of his life (Yeats, *Dramatis* 304); it also became a physical conflation of a literary and cultural tradition that Yeats longed for in the midst of radical change. Coole was filled with material tokens of this prominent past, from a framed letter of Edmund Burke to "signed photographs or engravings of

Tennyson, Mark Twain, Browning, [and] Thackery" (Yeats, *Dramatis* 292-3). Yeats reflects in his 1935 prose piece *Dramatis Personae* that "years were to pass before I came to understand the earlier nineteenth and later eighteenth century, and to love that house more than all other houses" (291). When "Coole Park, 1929" was written in September of 1929, the estate had already been purchased by the Irish Forestry Commission because Gregory had no living male heirs. It was a "time of instability in the history of Coole, with local workmen's strikes and threats of violence against landlords," so the continuation of Yeats's nostalgic and elegiac tone seems appropriate (Allison, "Galway" 103).

Unlike the women from "In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markievicz," however, Gregory does not appear to be altered or corrupted by time and experience. This is due perhaps to the fact that Yeats first met Lady Gregory when she was forty-five years old, a woman "without obvious good looks, except the charm that comes from strength, intelligence, and kindness" (Yeats, *Dramatis* 293). Unlike Markievicz and Gore-Booth—whose political activism Yeats chauvinistically credited with their demise—Lady Gregory remained dedicated to a cultural rather than political nationalism. To Yeats, Gregory was never a figure of idealized beauty like Eva Gore-Booth or the poet's beloved Maud Gonne, but through these two memorial poems he reveals that she was central to his artistic development. She represents to Yeats a unique "confluence of feminine beauty and masculine sublimity" and is able "to achieve an extraordinary

wedding of power and wisdom" (Holdridge, "Landscape" 296). In a volume of poetry so deeply devoted to movement and vacillation, Coole and Lady Gregory become a rare, though illusive, still point.

Beginning "Coole Park, 1929" in a moment of reflection, the speaker states, "I meditate upon a swallow's flight / Upon an aged woman and her house" (lines 1-2). This image of the swallow is carried throughout the poem, and the reader learns that the poet compares himself to the familiar romantic bird. However, even though the speaker notes in the opening line that he meditates on a single swallow's flight, the poem actually reflects on the lives of numerous male artists of the Irish Literary Revival and the role that Lady Gregory and Coole played in their careers:

> There Hyde before he had beaten into prose
> That noble blade the Muses buckled on,
> There one that ruffled in a manly pose
> For all his timid heart, there that slow man,
> That meditative man, John Synge, and those
> Impetuous men, Shawe-Taylor and Hugh Lane,
> Found pride established in humility,
> A scene well set and excellent company. (9-16)

This poem is a memorial to one specific woman, but it also memorializes an entire generation and cultural movement. Aside from Douglas Hyde and Yeats himself, all the men mentioned in the poem had already died, and the listing of individuals echoes the language seen in Yeats's earlier occasional poem "Easter, 1916." Jonathan Allison develops this contrast in his essay "Galway: Coole and Ballylee," suggesting that unlike the figures in "Easter, 1916," "In this poem, this is no damning critique: these people are

idealized and admired unequivocally: they are noble and meditative, impetuous and proud" (105). This observation is important because it reveals Yeats's desperate need for an untarnished and ordered past.

The poet clearly laments the loss of this artistic community and beautifully portrays their previous relationship through the familiar imagery of the undulating wave and the vortical gyre:

> They came like swallows and like swallows went,
> And yet a woman's powerful character
> Could keep a swallow to its first intent;
> And half a dozen in formation there,
> That seemed to whirl upon a compass-point,
> Found certainty upon the dreaming air, (17-22)

In a world of constant tension and shifting dualities, Lady Gregory and Coole become the "compass-point" for an entire literary movement (21). And while this poem's unusual language of stillness and conviction amplifies the magnitude of Lady Gregory's influence, Yeats is also very careful to include the less definitive "seemed" (21). This simple shift in diction reveals Yeats's acceptance of a Bergsonian world of perpetual motion and change. Yeats's use of the past-tense throughout the first three stanzas of the poem also reminds the reader that this joyous time of creativity and stability is over or at least coming to an end. Coole Park is no longer part of a generational legacy; Lady Gregory is dying of cancer, and Yeats's health is quickly deteriorating, so the speaker implores the reader to remember and honor this woman and this place even "When all the rooms and passages are gone" (26).

And although the poem is almost entirely a tribute to the feminine, primary energy of a previous era, the intertextual allusions to "Easter, 1916" and "The Second Coming" complicate the dominant elegiac tone. Lady Gregory may be a seemingly stable center of an oscillating artistic community, but any reader of Yeats knows from "The Second Coming" that "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold" (line 3). That time of certainty and order, if it ever existed, is over and something new is coming to take its place. That perceived stability can only exist in a constructed memory of the past, and Yeats seems to acknowledge that the reality of the present is change and movement. This acknowledgement may be reluctant at times, but it still reveals an awareness and acceptance of Bergsonian flux.

This acknowledgement of continuous change is made even more explicit in the following poem, "Coole and Ballylee, 1931," when the poet directly echoes the language of "Easter, 1916" in the line, "But all is changed…" (46). The "terrible beauty" evoked in "Easter, 1916" is implied at the end of this poem and there is once again a lament for a previous era. Declaring "We were the last romantics," (41) the poet calls attention to his own place within a shifting literary tradition, acknowledging,

> But all is changed, that high horse riderless,
> Though mounted in that saddle Homer rode
> Where the swan drifts upon a darkening flood. (46-8)

As Marjorie Perloff notes, "Coole and Ballylee, 1931" is certainly "one of Yeats's most pessimistic poems" (234), and understandably so given that it "was completed during the last months of Lady Gregory's fatal illness in 1932" (Perloff 223). Part of this

pessimism, however, is not only a result of personal loss but it stems from an absence of purpose for the poet. At the end of the poem, Pegasus—"that high horse" and classical symbol of epic poetry—is "riderless" (46). The poet can no longer choose a theme of "Traditional sanctity and loveliness" (42). The poetic landscape has changed and it is no coincidence that the poem concludes with an image of Pegasus, a mythical creature obedient to Zeus, and a swan, Yeats's symbol from *A Vision* of Zeus and the antithetical cycle.

Yeats was constantly revising *A Vision* while composing poems for *The Winding Stair*, and since Book V of *A Vision,* titled "Dove or Swan," begins with the poem "Leda," it is difficult to see the swan in "Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931" as a disconnected symbol from Yeats's larger system of belief. Although the speaker of the poem describes the swan as "like the soul" (19) and "arrogantly pure," (23) the "sudden thunder of the mounting swan" (14) also calls to mind the image of Leda's rape by Zeus. And although "Coole Park, 1929" concludes with the optimistic hope that Lady Gregory, and all she represents, will be remembered, "Coole and Ballylee, 1931" presents a darker and more cynical view of a lost past. This poem, when read in tandem with "Coole, 1929" displays a necessary tension between Yeats's nostalgia for the past and his excitement and apprehension of the future.

Placed beside each other in the volume and similarly titled, "Coole Park, 1929" and "Coole and Ballylee, 1931" are an obvious pairing in the carefully structured volume *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* and certainly articulate Yeats's primacy of antinomical tensions. However, "The Crazed Moon," the poem that immediately

precedes "Coole Park, 1929," is also a vital counterpart and one that bears remarkably direct parallels in language and theme. Less frequently discussed in scholarly conversations, "The Crazed Moon" is a powerful poem about the current state of poetry, presented in three stanzas using an altered version of *ottava rima*.[49] In the first two stanzas, the speaker of the poem personifies the traditionally feminine symbol of the moon, reflecting on what it once was and what it is today. The obviously Romantic moon is described as "Crazed through much child-bearing" (1) and "staggering in the sky" (2) while the poets "grope, and grope in vain, / For children born of her pain" (5-6). This sexualized image of the feminine moon presents "a vision of historical exhaustion" (Adams 191). Since the moon was commonly associated with the Romantic poetic muse and idealized beauty, Yeats's depiction once again draws attention to a drastic shift in literary and historical epochs and highlights his skepticism of the experimental poetry of the younger generations. The lunar muse that inspired writers like Shelley, Byron, and even a younger Yeats no longer serves the modernist poet.

The fact that "The Crazed Moon" was originally written in 1923 and then later revised in 1930[50] to be included in *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* helps to illuminate the frantic immediacy of the poem's tone. Although literature and culture were of course transitioning in the early thirties when *The Winding Stair* was published, in 1923 Yeats's world was consumed by radical change. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Joyce's *Ulysses* had just been published the previous year, permanently altering the

[49] Instead of the traditional eight lines of poetry rhyming abababcc, each stanza in of "The Crazed Moon" includes six lines, rhyming ababcc.
[50] See Kelly's *Chronology* for specific dates.

literary landscape. Ireland had gained partial independence but was in the initial stages of a Civil War, and Yeats was becoming an even more public figure in Ireland and abroad, winning the Nobel Prize for Literature and serving as a senator in the government of the new Irish Free State. The world that Yeats encountered in 1923 was paradoxically one of immense fear and possibility, and this emotional flux is certainly present in "The Crazed Moon."

The nostalgia seen in other poems in the volume manifests in this poem in the second stanza when the speaker exclaims,

> When she in all her virginal pride
> First trod on the mountain's head
> What stir ran through the countryside
> Where every foot obeyed her glance!
> What manhood led the dance! (8-12)

By reflecting on the personified moon's "virginal" youth, the speaker recalls a previous era when poetry was fresh and celebratory, and the moon had complete control over the male poet because she was pure and beautiful, untouched by other lovers. Contrasted with the image of a crazed moon exhausted from bearing children, this virginal moon can be seen as preferable to the speaker. The third stanza, however, in typical Yeatsian fashion, complicates this simple binary. The poem moves from a nostalgic reflection of the past in the second stanza to a terrifying image of the present in the third, one that circles back to the tone of the opening stanza. Using inclusive pronouns, the speaker describes the modern poet's destabilizing predicament:

Fly-catchers of the moon,
Our hands are blenched, our fingers seem
But slender needles of bone;
Blenched by that malicious dream

They are spread wide that each
May rend what comes in reach. (13-18)

This horrifying image not only contrasts the idyllic past presented in the previous stanza, but it also explicitly contrasts the imagery from the neighboring poem "Coole Park, 1929."

In "Coole Park, 1929" the artists of a previous generation are described as "swallows," coming and going from the house at Coole and finding "certainty upon the dreaming air" (22). In "The Crazed Moon," however, a new generation of artists and poets is described in similar avian language, but they are no longer swallows, only ordinary "Fly-catchers" (13). Although the fly-catcher is in many ways similar to a swallow,[51] the shift in language from a mythologized bird like the swallow to an ordinary bird known for its plainness and lack of song suggests an important contrast between the poets of the previous generation and Yeats's new contemporaries. Since Yeats was in his sixties when he wrote and published *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* and his poetic career had already spanned over four decades, his literary peers were no longer men and women of his generation. The Pre-Raphaelite and Romantic influences of his youth were dismissed by writers and scholars alike, leaving a mature Yeats in a liminal position of artistic development. This perhaps explains why Yeats looked back to his time at Coole with individuals like Hyde, Synge, and Gregory as a time of community and inspiration.

[51] Both birds are known for their aerial feeding habits.

Once again, Yeats shows resistance to change while also acknowledging its inevitability. He may yearn for the virginal moon of the past, and he may genuinely see himself as the last romantic, but his use of "our" in this final stanza implies that he is also part of this new movement of poetry. They may tear apart the fabric of tradition, but he is part of that destruction. His use of an altered version of *ottava rima* even subtly gestures towards his participation in this break from tradition.

When paired together, "The Crazed Moon" and "Coole Park, 1929" also present a tension between unity and destruction. In "Coole Park, 1929," the speaker of the poem emphasizes a unity of purpose and product when he states,

> Great works constructed there in nature's spite
> For scholars and for poets after us,
> Thoughts long knitted into a single thought,
> A dance-like glory that those walls begot. (5-8)

Not only is the language of birth and creation echoed in the choice of the word "begot," but there is a specific focus on bringing disparate things together, weaving thoughts "into a single thought" (7). This accentuation of concord relates directly to Yeats's view of the *primary tincture* in *A Vision* where the antithetical and subjective "tends to separate man from man" and the primary and objective "brings us back to the mass where we begin" (Yeats, *AVB* 53). Yeats appears to be using these two poems to represent his understanding of these conflicting historical cycles, with "Coole Park, 1929" stressing concord and "The Crazed Moon" dramatizing discord. This dramatization is evident in the final lines of "The Crazed Moon" when the speaker describes the poets' hands: "They are spread wide that each / May rend what comes in reach" (17-18). This striking image

of violent separation effectively placed before an image of peaceful union underscores Yeats's predilection for dualities and echoes Bergson's "conviction that the universe is dialectic, with opposing processes of demolition and creation going on continuously" (Douglass 113).

And although the entire volume of *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* exhibits a similar duality, these two poems seem particularly wedded through the author's choice of parallel diction. Not only are the birds a consistent image in each poem, but the language of union and separation is expressed explicitly through the connotative diction of fabric. The artists at Coole have "knitted" (7) ideas together while the poets in "The Crazed Moon" have chosen to "rend" everything that "comes in reach" (18). This imagery of fabric is used in multiple poems from *The Winding S*tair and *The Tower*, and it echoes Bergson's concept of a unified, heterogeneous multiplicity achieved through intuition rather than intellect alone. Like the image of waves, which move as a unified force but are composed of individual droplets of water, the symbolic image of fabric also calls attention to the whole comprised by the many. For Bergson, unification and heterogeneity are not antithetical to one another. As Gilllies notes, Bergson finds a way around simple dualities by focusing on "the shades of grey that exist between the polar opposites of white and black" ("(Re)Reading" 16).

This violent separation, however, is not entirely presented as a negative counterpoint to order. Like "In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markievicz," there is a subtle potential for sublimity and transformation at the end of "The Crazed Moon." Even though the poet states that "Our hands are blenched, our fingers seem / But slender

needles of bone;" (14-15) the hands are "Blenched by that malicious dream" (16). By referring to the moon as a "malicious dream," Yeats implies that the order and unity displayed in poems like "Coole Park, 1929" may also be a destructive illusion, a false vision of idealized beauty and order that is finally exposed. With this reading, the pale, bleached hands can be interpreted not only as a terrifying image of eradication, but as a poet stripped down to his essential self and allowed to start again "In the foul rag and bone shop of the heart" (Yeats, "The Circus Animals" 40). The violent tearing apart of the previous progeny of the poetic moon can be seen as a necessary act of artistic freedom—an act that resembles Bergson's belief that literature has the power "to brush aside the utilitarian symbols, the conventional and socially accepted generalities, in short, everything that veils reality from us, in order to bring us face to face with reality itself" (*Laughter* 157). In a remarkably Modernist move, Yeats suggests in this poem that the symbols and language of the past are no longer viable. The beautiful feminine moon that once hypnotized the Romantics, including himself, is used up and must be fractured.

This dual expression of loss and sublime potentiality is echoed again and summarized in the brief four-line poem "The Nineteenth Century and After":

> Though the great song return no more
> There's keen delight in what we have:
> The rattle of pebbles on the shore
> Under the receding wave. (1-4)

In this beautiful short poem, the speaker is obviously conflicted about the past and the present. He believes that a "great song" is perhaps gone forever, but he also takes "keen delight" in the present. The connotative weight of the phrase "keen delight" perfectly

expresses Yeats's emotional duality and gestures once again to an invocation of the sublime. Although "keen" can certainly refer to enthusiasm or intensity, given the Irish context, it also denotes a lamentation for the dead. The Burkean notion of "delight" is achieved here, but only through pain. The "great song" may be gone, but the "rattle of pebbles" as well as the poet's own keening creates a new type of music, even though it is one infused with fragmentation and loss. In a letter to Olivia Shakespear—written from Rapallo and dated March 2, 1929—Yeats includes a version of this poem and adds, "I have come to fear the world's last great poetic period is over" (759). He also includes that "The young do not feel like that—George does not, nor Ezra—," implying that a younger generation of poets like Pound do not view the rattle in the same way (759). Yeats's depiction of the current state of poetry existing "Under the receding wave" once again highlights his reluctant acceptance of the reality of Bergsonian fluidity.

Both *The Tower* and *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* represent a poetic dedication to dialectic exploration, a struggle between traditional order and Bergsonian fluidity. The themes and images that are outlined in *A Vision* not only inform these volumes of poetry but they serve as an intertextual cipher for the reader. Understanding Yeats's belief in the necessity of tension and conflict allows a reader to see these poems as poetic experiments—conversations that recognize dualities but dramatize interpenetration rather than stasis or resolution. They do not present us with answers, but they do encourage us to keep asking questions. As Anthony Bradley points out, each poem "demands of his reader the kind of writerly empathy and engagement that modernist writers demand of their readers; that is, the reader cannot passively expect

meaning to present itself with little effort on his/her part, but must actively produce meaning in the text" (108). Although critics have noted the tensions that exist in each collection, additional pairings of poems and a closer look at previously neglected texts can continue to enrich our critical understanding of Yeats's complex relationship to a version of modernism that is both reliant on and skeptical of tradition. In both *The Tower* and *The Winding Stair*, readers encounter an aging poet struggling to accept a new Bergsonian world of perpetual change and unpredictable movement. Like *A Vision*, these two collections position order and structure against discord and fluidity, and yet they reveal a poet who recognizes that these opposing views do not necessarily require resolution; they can exist, instead, in a state of fluctuating tension. In this way, Yeats demonstrates that Bergsonian movement and multiplicity must undergird any pattern or system that attempts to intellectualize experience.

CHAPTER IV

PATTERN AND FLUX: ECHOES OF *A VISION* IN WOOLF'S *THE WAVES*

In "A Sketch of the Past," Virginia Woolf describes her earliest memory as a trip to St. Ives where she was immersed in the sounds and experience of the sea:

> It is of lying half asleep, half awake, in bed in the nursery at St. Ives. It is of hearing the waves breaking, one, two, one, two, and sending a splash of water over the beach; and then breaking, one, two, one, two, behind a yellow blind. It is of hearing the blind draw its little acorn across the floor as the wind blew the blind out. It is lying and hearing this splash and seeing this light, and feeling, it is almost impossible that I should be here; of feeling the purest ecstasy I can conceive. (64-65)

The sea and the image of the waves are a common feature in much of Woolf's fiction. It emerges in early novels like *The Voyage Out* and *Jacob's Room*, evolving and gaining rhythmic and thematic prominence in seminal texts like *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *Orlando*. The culmination of this evolution, however, comes, most obviously, in 1931 in the form of Woolf's most experimental novel, *The Waves.* To say that *The Waves* is a novel that places a great deal of importance on the use of waves, does, at first, seem comically redundant and reductive. Woolf clearly tips her hand in the title by imbuing this image with symbolic weight, and numerous critics throughout the years have noted the topographical and stylistic function of the waves in the text.

Although this argument will examine and explore Woolf's use of the waves as image and theme throughout the novel, I am specifically interested in the way the waves

engage with a Bergsonian concept of duration, and how they do so in a way that is unexpectedly similar to W.B. Yeats experimental, multi-genre text *A Vision*. Rarely discussed in the same critical conversations, Woolf and Yeats are typically viewed as antipodean. Woolf is usually associated with other stylistically experimental modernists like Joyce and Eliot, while Yeats—set apart by age—is depicted as stylistically traditional and conservative and still remains on the periphery of the majority of modernist discourse.

However, when Woolf declares in February of 1931 that she has finally finished *The Waves* and "ended that vision," it is difficult to ignore her Yeatsian diction (Diary 4: 8). Although *The Waves* is admittedly a different project from Yeats's *A Vision*, both texts share a particular interest in the artistic representation of time and experience from a personal and universal perspective. Their scope is simultaneously internal and external, and there is a desire in each to be saturated with experience. In addition, both texts incorporate an overarching cyclical structure. Yeats's Great Wheel of lunar phases is echoed in Woolf's interludes, which follow the rising and setting of the sun throughout the day. This cyclical structure is also countered in each text by an oscillating movement in structure and style.

Yeats's system in *A Vision* is grounded in the image and movement of the double gyre, continuously fluctuating between the primary/objective and antithetical/subjective tinctures. Similarly, the structure of the *The Waves* contracts to the personal, subjective thoughts and collective experiences of six individuals before dilating to the more objective, natural world of the interludes. Both texts also utilize these complex images of

multidirectional movement in an attempt to pattern and order a Bergsonian world of inevitably chaotic flux. Again, Woolf relies primarily on the image and movement of the waves, while Yeats employs a similar movement in his double gyre. For both authors, these images become more than simple motifs or symbols. They permeate the very fabric of each text, becoming structurally, thematically and stylistically essential.

Woolf's work is almost always associated with William James's concept of stream of consciousness, an association that naturally lends itself to an engagement with Bergsonian theory.[52] Yeats's *A Vision* initially appears to be the opposite, a meticulously charted system interested in order and fixity. As the previous chapters have explained, however, Yeats's mystical system is far from fixed or static. Similarly, Woolf's narrative approach and style is not without form or pattern. Although many readers associate Woolf's writing with "unregulated fluidity," Shiv Kumar accurately notes that the novels of Woolf "invariably represent an architectonic schematization of experience" (62). Woolf's "imperative need to superimpose some kind of aesthetic design on the indeterminate flow" is what Kumar argues makes her stream of consciousness narration successful when other authors fail (62). Like Yeats's *A Vision*, *The Waves* recognizes the fluidity of experience but overlays it with a pattern or structure to create tension.

Although I am not arguing that Woolf consciously employs Yeatsian images in her work, I do find that these supposed literary counterparts are far less disparate than we might originally assume. Rather than standing at opposite ends of an uncomplicated modernist spectrum, they seem, instead, to swirl around one another, twisting and turning

[52] William James and Henri Bergson had immense respect for one another and shared many similar beliefs and theories, becoming friends before James died in 1910.

around shared ideas and questions, overlapping with brief moments of shared symbolic imagery. Woolf and Yeats are rarely placed in critical conversation with one another, and yet their use of waves and gyres as explorations of time and experience, of examination rather than mere explanation, is more than just coincidence. It is true that the majority of their work moves in different directions, but for these few years in the late nineteen-twenties and early thirties, their writing shares a metaphysical orbit, one which I believe partially, though perhaps indirectly, originates with the philosophical ideas of Henri Bergson.

The argument that Virginia Woolf's experimental novel *The Waves* is inherently Bergsonian is an argument that has been made convincingly before. Ruth Gruber made the explicit connection between Woolf and Bergson in her early 1935 study of Woolf's work and later critics like Shiv K. Kumar and Mary Ann Gillies, among many others, have explored this interesting and complex relationship. Charismatic and remarkably accessible for a mathematician turned philosopher, Henri Bergson became "something of a cult figure" in the first two decades of the twentieth century, with unprecedented crowds flocking to his readings and lectures (Guerlac 12). His theories embraced a creative optimism grounded in intuition, and he pushed against mechanization in favor of qualitative rather than quantitative experience. Bergson's emphasis on intuition rather than analysis coupled with his understanding of duration (real time) as non-linear force rather than space, blurred commonly held perceptions and opened up new avenues for artistic interpretations of personal, historical, and imagined time. His understanding of

"time as force" also worked to unsettle what he believed was a "static conception of time" which served only as a "defense against the heterogeneity of the real" (Guerlac 2).

Bergson's ideas also became foundational aspects of modernist experiments with non-linear, or stream-of-consciousness, narration, which is one reason he is so frequently discussed in connection with authors like Woolf and Joyce.[53] And because of his ideas and the way they converged with similar developing theories in disciplines as diverse as psychology and quantum physics, "our sense of consciousness, memory, and perception, our experience of time, our ways of seeing and knowing, all changed" (Ardoin, et al. 2). And although Woolf claimed that she never read Bergson's work, it is clear that she was aware of his ideas through both direct and indirect means.[54]

Not only did the revolutionary philosophies of Henri Bergson saturate the intellectual landscape of the early twentieth century, but many of Woolf's immediate Bloomsbury circle were intrigued by and engaged with his theories. Clive Bell and Roger Fry, for example, agreed with Bergson on numerous philosophical and aesthetic points, and as Paul Douglass notes, Woolf's sister-in-law, Karin Costelloe Stephen, even wrote a book on Bergson.[55] Woolf may not have read this text, but on February 3, 1913, she did attend a talk where Costelloe discussed her interpretation of Bergsonian theory (Douglass 115). In other words, Bergson's revolutionary ideas of *durée*, flux, and *elán vital* could not have been entirely unfamiliar to Woolf, even if she never read or studied his texts for

[53] See Shiv Kumar's seminal 1962 monograph *Bergson and the Stream of Consciousness Novel* for an important early example.
[54] In a letter to Harmon H. Goldstone, dated August 16, 1932, Woolf writes, "I may say that I have never read Bergson and have only a very amateurish knowledge of Freud and the psychoanalysts; I have made no study of them" (5: 91).
[55] Stephen's published *The Misuse of Mind; A Study of Bergson's Attack on Intellectualism* in 1922, which includes a prefatory letter by Bergson.

herself. She was, after all, as early critic Ruth Gruber puts it, "living in the Bergsonian atmosphere," which allowed her to draw "even unconsciously from the truths he had established" (109). In fact, this second-hand contact with his ideas perhaps explains the overwhelming presence of Bergsonian concepts in Woolf's work without specific reference to his philosophy. Woolf may not be consciously or intentionally engaging with Bergson, but her work, and specifically her use of waves and gyres in *The Waves*, seems to enact a Bergsonian notion of duration: "the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances" (Bergson, *Creative Evolution* 4). According to Bergson, there is no fixed point: "the truth is that we change without ceasing, and that the state itself is nothing but change" (*Creative* 2). And in *The Waves*, Woolf seems dedicated to observing, embracing, and charting that process.

Although the attempt to chart this process, to record it and make sense of the flux, can be understood as a particularly anti-Bergsonian move because it seeks to order what is chaotic and homogenize what is heterogeneous, it is important to remember that "one must not overlook Bergson's preoccupation with how the impressions of life are to be represented in the spatial world and his reluctant acceptance of the need to find adequate ways of spatializing *durée* in order to make it intelligible" (Gillies, *Henri* 55). According to Bergson, words are static because they are tied to specific meanings and cannot, therefore, ever successfully represent *durée* because language "spatializes time, translating the (unsegmented) motion of thought into the segmentation of the space that motion transgresses" (Mattison 323). However, Bergson recognizes that even in his attempts to explain durational experience and qualitative multiplicity, he is ironically

forced to utilize language, so in order to deal with this dilemma, he frequently turns to metaphors and specifically images as a way of best representing the unrepresentable experience of duration.

"Image" is a key term for Bergson, and throughout this chapter I will be referring to Woolf's waves primarily as "images" rather than "symbols" or "metaphors" because I think they embody Bergson's definition of an image: "a certain existence which is more than that which the idealist calls a *representation,* but less than that which the realist calls a *thing*, —an existence placed half-way between the 'thing' and the 'representation'" (*Matter* vii-viii). This multivalent definition of image is similar to Ezra Pound's Vorticist philosophy, where he describes the image as "the furthest possible remove from rhetoric" (280) and "that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time" (Pound 283). Influenced by Bergson, Pound's definition similarly emphasizes process and multiplicity rather than stasis and uniformity. Pound's Vorticism is interested in the concrete rather than the abstract, but that concretization is surprisingly not fixed or absolute. For Pound, "The image is the word beyond formulated language" (Pound 285). Both Pound and Bergson see images as distinct from symbols because in their view, a symbol imposes meaning while an image withholds conclusiveness. Bergson wants to avoid definitiveness in favor of multiplicity, and his use of the image "offers a method for writing that opens spaces within language that are not reducible to representation and that thus remain outside the (habitual) language system" (Mattison 323).

Woolf's Mystical Vision

Typically associated with mysticism and the occult, Yeats's work in *A Vision* may seem like an odd point of comparison for Woolf's structurally and stylistically experimental novel. Unlike Yeats, Woolf rarely displays an interest in the magical or supernatural in her work, and yet she describes the *The Waves* in November of 1928—at that time titled *The Moths*—as "an abstract mystical eyeless book: a playpoem" that would require her to come to terms with her "mystical feelings" (*Diar*y 3: 203). She notes that she wants to do something different after the ease and fun of Orlando because in that project she avoided what was difficult: "I never got down to my depths & made shapes square up, as I did in The Lighthouse" (*Diary* 3: 203). She also states years earlier about the nascent notion of the novel that "It is to be an endeavor at something mystical, spiritual; the thing that exists when we aren't there" (*Diary* 3: 114). The mysticism of the text was not lost on critics since Gerald Bullett, who reviewed *The Waves* for the *New Statesman and Nation*, called her "a metaphysical poet who has chosen prose-fiction for her medium" (qtd. in Hussey 356).

Woolf's earliest concept of *The Waves* can also be traced to September of 1926 when after a serious bout of depression, she notes in her diary her desire to explore the "mystical side of this solitude" and references "a fin passing far out," a vision that she cannot quite grasp symbolically, but one that seems connected to a mixture of fear and excitement (3: 113). As J. Hillis Miller notes, "Woolf speaks not of language but rather of the way memories return as visions" (673). This image of the fin is mentioned again in her diaries and is repeated in *The Waves* when Bernard declares, "I see far out a waste of

water. A fin turns. This bare visual impression is unattached to any line of reason, it springs up as one might see the fin of a porpoise on the horizon" (189). Since the fin is deeply connected to Woolf's memory, the porpoise's fin in the novel becomes representational of a Bergsonian memory that rises to the surface, breaking into reality in an unexpected and unpredictable way. It reveals a glimpse of something intuitive, but of course it does not linger; it breaks the surface only for a moment, only partially exposed with the majority of it hidden beneath the mystery of the water's edge. It is another image of movement, an experience rather than a cognitive reflection. It does not mean one particular thing; instead, it embodies a process of knowing, and Woolf confesses that "by writing I dont reach anything […] I want to watch & see how the idea at first occurs. I want to trace my own process" (*Diary* 3: 113).

Woolf's emphasis on memory and vision and her metacognitive desire to displace herself from her work in order to trace her process is certainly reminiscent of Yeats's work and the mystical visions and automatic writing that produced *A Vision*. Although Woolf craves distance from her work in order to observe it taking shape, in Yeats's case, the author was actually dislocated from the writing process, receiving his material from spiritual Communicators. The work of *A Vision* did not entirely begin with Yeats, but instead started with the automatic writing and mediumship of his wife George. For years, George engaged in a spiritualist form of mediumship where "messages purporting to be from disembodied communicators from realms of spirit brought thousands of bits of information, information that was questioned, trusted, distrusted, and elaborated upon" (Harper, *Wisdom of Two* 5). Yeats spent years organizing and making sense of these

fragments of information, and the final product of this unusual collaboration was *A Vision*—a carefully charted system of belief.

It is partially this conviction of belief that Woolf admires in Yeats's poetry. Her 1923 essay "How it Strikes a Contemporary," written for the *Times Literary Supplement*, compares her contemporaries to the great literary masters of the past and finds the present wanting. She describes the current literary landscape as "an age of fragment," with moments of greatness but only a few things that will survive the test of time (355). In this short list she includes, "A little poetry, we may feel sure, will survive; a few poems by Mr. Yeats […]" (356). Overall, however, she is brutal to her own generation of writers, describing Joyce's *Ulysses* as "a memorable catastrophe" (356) and boldly asking, "But can we go to posterity with a sheaf of loose pages, or ask the readers of those days, with the whole of literature before them, to sift our enormous rubbish heaps for our tiny pearls?" (355). Woolf's fascinating essay argues that contemporary writers turn to the past "impelled not by calm judgement but by some imperious need to anchor our stability upon their security" (357). She goes on, however, to note that these "masterpieces of the past" (357) are actually quite dull, arguing that

> It is the power of their belief—their conviction, that imposes itself upon us. […] if you believe it implicitly and unquestionably, you will not only make people a hundred years later feel the same thing, but you will make them feel it as literature. For certainty of that kind is the condition which makes it possible to write. (358)

Contemporary writers are, therefore, inferior to the writers of the past because "they have ceased to believe" (358). If this is what Woolf finds lacking in her peers, it is no wonder

that she praises and admires Yeats's later work, particularly *The Tower,* a volume of poems produced from Yeats's system in *A Vision*.[56] After all, Yeats is certainly a poet of belief, and he describes his system as helping him "hold in a single thought reality and justice" (*AVB* 19). While Woolf chastises her peers because they "cannot make a world," Yeats actually constructs his own system for understanding the universe and all of history—a system that makes the world comprehendible and bearable—and he relies on it as a foundation and font for his poetry ("How It" 359).

Like Yeats, Woolf creates in *The Waves* a world that she can endure, a world that is structured and controlled, but one that still recognizes fluidity, multiplicity, and movement. This tension between order and flux is present even in the conception and composition of the text. Michael Whitworth notes that an early working title for *The Waves* was "the life of anybody," most likely a clever allusion to Jules Romains 1911 unanimism novel *Mort de Quelqu'un*, which was "translated in 1914 by Woolf's friends Sydney Waterlow and Desmond McCarthy as *Death of a Nobody*" (Whitworth 159). Romains's unanimism developed from the ideas of Walt Whitman and Henri Bergson, and his novel was described by Leonard Woolf as a novel without characters or plot (Whitworth 159). Woolf's novel later developed the working title *The Moths*, originating from a letter she received from her sister Vanessa in 1927, describing the moths that were occupying her villa in Cassis, France (Briggs 241). This letter fascinated Woolf and in her response to Vanessa, she told her she planned to write a story about it, stating, "I could think of nothing else but you and the moths for hours after reading your letter"

[56] See Woolf's unsigned review "Mr Yeats" in the *Nation & Athenaeum*, 21 April 1928.

(qtd. in Briggs 241). This title appears to have been the prominent choice until late-September of 1929, when Woolf notes in her diary, "Yesterday morning I made another start on The Moths, but that wont be its title.& several problems cry out at once to be solved. Who thinks it? And am I outside the thinker?" (3: 257). A month later, Woolf's diary entry from October 23, 1929 reveals the waves emerging as a title and replacement image for the moths, an image that would grow to dominate the text structurally, stylistically, and thematically: "The Moths; but I think it is to be waves, is trudging along; & I have that to refer to, if I am damped by the other"[57] (3: 262).

It seems important to note this evolution of title and subject matter because one aspect of the novel's distinctiveness is its extensive level of revision—a process of perpetual becoming that echoes the Bergsonian theories functioning, perhaps unintentionally or unconsciously, within the novel. It is also reminiscent of Yeats's extensive revision process for *A Vision*, which began with the automatic script in 1917 and was not completed until 1937. Like Yeats, Woolf rewrote *The Waves* numerous times, and each conclusion seems to have only brought about an unquenchable, enthusiastic desire to start again. Even as late as May 1st, 1930, Woolf states,

> The truth is, of course, I want to be back at The Waves. Yes that is the truth. Unlike all my other books in every way, it is unlike them in this, that I begin to re-write it, & conceive it again with ardour, directly I have done. I begin to see what I had in my mind; & want to begin cutting out masses of irrelevance, & clearing, sharpening & making the good phrases shine. One wave after another. (*Diary* 3: 303)

[57] The other text that Woolf refers to is *A Room of One's Own*. Woolf was anxious about its reception and worried that she wouldn't be taken seriously.

Woolf's description of composition as "One wave after another" reveals how intrinsic this image is to the conception and creation of the novel, and I contend that Woolf's use of the wave as a foundational image is rooted in Bergsonian notions of time and duration—where stasis is not possible because our experience of time and our understanding of the self is in a perpetual process of becoming: "to exist is to change, to change is to mature, and to mature is to go on creating oneself endlessly" (Bergson, *Creative Evolution* 7).

The waves were also a very personal method of description for Woolf, an image and pattern of movement that she frequently employs to articulate her own mental and emotional struggles with depression and anxiety. Her diary entry from September 15, 1926, for example, states,

> Woke up perhaps at 3. Oh its beginning its coming—the horror—physically like a painful wave swelling about the heart—tossing me up. I'm unhappy unhappy! Down—God, I wish I were dead. Pause. But why am I feeling this? Let me watch the wave rise. I watch. Vanessa. Children. Failure. Yes; I detect that. Failure failure. (The wave rises). Oh they laughed at my taste in green paint! Wave crashes. I wish I were dead! I've only a few years to live I hope. I cant face this horror any more—(this is the wave spreading out over me). (3: 110)

Woolf experienced anxiety and depression as uncontrollable, unstoppable waves crashing over her, and we see this type of language repeated in the novel when Rhoda tries to assure herself of stability by touching her feet to the bed rail, relying on the language of the waves to describe her fluctuating state of mind. In one moment, she says, "I sink, I fall!" but this is soon followed by "I rise […] I am now fallen […] Let me pull myself out of these waters" before concluding, "I am turned; I am tumbled" (27-28). Woolf is,

perhaps, most frequently associated with Rhoda's character, though she also resembles Bernard, and Julia Briggs notes that "Jinny" was her nickname as a child (242). Rhoda's insecurities and anxieties repeatedly resemble the author's, however, and the waves become a useful method of description because they emphasize the continuous uncontrollability of these emotions and the instability of the self. Like Woolf, Rhoda commits suicide, and though Rhoda's method is unclear, Bernard implies that she may have jumped from the cliffs in Spain into the sea when he states, "I see far away, quivering like a gold thread, the pillar Rhoda saw, and feel the rush of the wind of her flight when she leapt" (289).

Since Woolf often described her illness using the imagery of the waves and eventually chose her own death by water, it would be logical to assign the image a strictly negative association. The waves, however, were not always threatening and painful for her. Though at times they help her express the complexities of her mental anguish, they are also associated with her very first and "most important" memory—a trip to St. Ives where she remembers hearing and experiencing the sound and rhythm of the waves and "feeling the purest ecstasy [one] can conceive" ("A Sketch" 64-65). Woolf also notes that "If life has a base that it stands upon, if it is a bowl that one fills and fills and fills—then my bowl without a doubt stands upon this memory" ("A Sketch" 64). Just as Woolf uses the image of the waves to embrace an ever shifting tension of opposites in her creative works, the waves themselves embody a paradoxical connotation in the writer's memory. They simultaneously convey pain and ecstasy, and the constant vacillation between these extremes saturates Woolf's texts as well as her creative process.

According to her biographer and nephew, Quentin Bell, Woolf's method of composition also mimicked the ebb and flow of the waves she relied on, where "moments of depression were followed by moments of creativity" (*Letters* 2: 112). At times, she was unable to produce any work, too ill or depressed to write and create. Some of her texts required extensive labor and others seemed to rush from her without effort. Dealing with what today would most likely be diagnosed as a bipolar disorder, Woolf lived her life in a perpetual state of mental and emotional fluctuation, so it seems natural that she would be drawn, even unconsciously, to a Bergsonian philosophy that emphasizes process and movement in all things.

Order and Fluidity

Woolf's dedication to movement and fluidity, however, is also countered—like Yeats—with an interest in control and order. Her work may utilize a stream of consciousness style, but it is not without precise form and structure. In "A Sketch of the Past," Woolf calls attention to her need for order by explaining her theory of moments of "non-being" and "moments of being" through the analogy of fabric. To Woolf, moments of non-being are comparable to a "nondescript cotton wool" (70). These moments are not lived consciously or deliberately. However, Woolf explains that her "philosophy" is "that behind the cotton wool is a hidden pattern; that we—I mean all human beings—are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art" ("A Sketch" 72). Woolf's emphasis on unity through heterogeneity echoes Bergson's qualitative multiplicity, but it is also strikingly similar to Yeats's system in *A Vision*, which is his attempt to uncover and untangle a pattern in the universe.

For Woolf, and I think Yeats as well, it is the pattern that brings comfort and stability:

> It is only by putting it into words that I make it whole; this wholeness means that it has lost its power to hurt me; it gives me, perhaps because by doing so I take away the pain, a great delight to put the severed parts together. Perhaps this is the strongest pleasure known to me. ("A Sketch" 72)

As this reflection conveys, Woolf delights in piecing fragments into a unified pattern or finding the pattern that already exists among the shards. For a writer whose work is perpetually associated with fluidity and flux, Woolf is also unmistakably controlled. Like Yeats, Woolf operates in a space of conflict and tension—a space where waves dominate, paradoxically encapsulating change and regularity.

This tension is conveyed on multiple levels throughout *The Waves,* including the unusual fluctuating narrative structure, where the reader is tossed back and forth from the natural world of the interludes to the private, personal lives of the six characters' soliloquies.[58] Although many critics focus their attention primarily on the interior lives of Bernard, Louis, Neville, Jinny, Rhoda, and Susan, and their complex relationship with one another, reading the exterior interludes as backdrop for the experimental plot, it seems to me that the natural, external world is as important to the text as the personal, interior world of these men and women. In fact, the two are presented in constant interpenetrating motion; although they initially appear as abrupt delineations in the narrative—even textually separated through a change in font—the language of each

[58] Woolf's diary entry from August 20, 1930 states, "The Waves is I think resolving itself (I am at page 100) into a series of dramatic soliloquies. The thing is to keep them running homogenously in & out, in the rhythm of the waves" (3: 312).

betrays complete separation.[59] Images leak from one section to the next, and internal thoughts and phrases of characters echo in the natural world. The opening scene of the novel, for example, depicts the natural image of the waves "*moving, one after another, beneath the surface, following each other, pursuing each other, perpetually*" (7), while the light of the rising sun slowly encroaches into the interior, private space of the house: "*The sun sharpened the walls of the house, and rested like the tip of a fan upon a white blind and made a blue fingerprint of shadow under the leaf by the bedroom window*" (8). From the beginning, the differentiations between the external and the internal are blurred, and the natural undulation of the wave is compared to "*a sleeper whose breath comes and goes unconsciously*" (7).

There is a permeability between these narrative divides that seems to intentionally undermine strict dualities, calling attention to the flux of experience while also highlighting the artist's role in its fabricated containment. This metacognition is exemplified in that same opening interlude, where Woolf, with beautiful lyricism, compares the development of a sunrise to a woman raising a lamp—where the indistinguishable fractures into individual parts while somehow maintaining its unity:

> as if the arm of a woman couched beneath the horizon had raised a lamp and flat bars of white, green and yellow, spread across the sky like the blades of a fan. Then she raised her lamp higher and the air seemed to become fibrous and to tear away from the green surface flickering and flaming in red and yellow fibres like the smoky fire that roars from a bonfire. Gradually the fibres of the burning bonfire were fused into one haze, one incandescence which lifted the weight of the woollen grey sky on top of it and turned it to a million atoms of soft blue. (7)

[59] Woolf's decision to italicize the interludes was a last minute decision made in June of 1931 (Briggs 262).

This striking description exemplifies her use of paradoxical language, and seems to echo the concerns found in her diary entry from January 4, 1929, where she states, "Perhaps it may be that though we change; are flying after another, so quick so quick, yet we are somehow successive, & continuous—we human beings; & show the light through. But what is the light?" (3: 218). The fictive woman's position as light-bearer certainly resembles Woolf's authorial presence as the one in control of what we see, ironically illuminating the unified until we perceive fragmentation, but also shining a light on fractures until we recognize cohesion.

Using the image and movement of the wave, Woolf is able to structurally fluctuate her scope from the objective to the subjective and the global to the personal with ease and control. This vacillation unquestionably mimics the structure of Yeats's system in *A Vision*, where the double gyre or vortex depicts "subjectivity and objectivity as intersecting states struggling one against the other" (*AVB* 52). Yeats's system also looks closely at the individual, charting his or her personality on a wheel of twenty-eight lunar phases, before broadening its scope to consider shifting epochs of history.

In addition to the structural function of the waves in the novel, Woolf's undulating imagery, diction, and syntax dominate the stylistic atmosphere of the text, and the "essential Bergsonian pattern of dilation and contraction underlies Woolf's idea of self" (Whitworth 161). At the beginning of the novel, the narration fluctuates from the interior lives of the young male characters—Bernard, Louis, and Neville—to the lives of the young women—Jinny, Rhoda, and Susan. While at school, these characters are separated, and their experiences are presented to the reader in separate waves until they

leave school for college and work. Similarly, within the soliloquies, each speaker frequently makes reference to the waves or uses the language and cadence of the waves to convey meaning. Rhoda, for example, describes, "Rippling small, rippling grey, innumerable waves spread beneath us. I touch nothing. I see nothing. We may sink and settle on the waves" (206). Jinny states, "Now the tide sinks. Now the trees come to earth; the brisk waves that slap my ribs rock more gently, and my heart rides at anchor, like a sailing boat whose sails slide slowly down on the white deck" (46). And Neville declares, "Now begins to rise in me the familiar rhythm; words that have lain dormant now toss their crests, and fall and rise, and fall and rise again" (82). These descriptions are not, however, limited to the soliloquies. Most of the interludes also include some mention of the waves through either direct reference or contracting and dilating diction. And while it is impossible to list every example of Woolf's vacillating syntax and surging imagery, it is important to note that it is present in almost every aspect of the text. While Louis repeats "I will reduce you to order" like a mantra, Bernard recalls, "He snatches the poker and with one blow destroys that momentary appearance of solidity in the burning coals. All changes" (90).

The rhythm of the waves is, in fact, essential not only to Woolf's structure but to her style and syntax as well. From her earliest memory, the regularity and rhythm of the waves crashing on the shore engaged her senses. She sees, hears, and feels this memory, and the association of the waves with a reassuring and ecstatic rhythm helps to explain the prevalence of the symbolic image in so much of her work. Bernard in *The Waves* notes parenthetically that "the rhythm is the main thing in writing" (79), and Woolf

similarly declares in a letter to Ethel Smyth in 1930 that she is "writing to a rhythm and not a plot" (4: 204). Even though the wave is an image of perpetual movement and change, there is also an order and pattern to it—a comforting regularity.

This patterned movement is not in contrast to the Bergsonian philosophy. In fact, Bergson frequently used rhythm in dance and music to help articulate his philosophy of duration, suggesting that when we watch a dancer move to music,

> the rhythm and the beat lead us to believe that we are the masters of these movements. […] The regularity of the rhythm establishes a kind of communication between us, and the periodic returns of the beat are like so many invisible threads by means of which we make this imaginary marionette dance. (qtd. in Guerlac 48)

As Suzanne Guerlac explains, "The dancer figures the change or movement, characterized by multiplicity and flow, which is specific to inner, qualitative experience in general, and figures qualitative change, differences in kind as movement through time. The movement of the dancer lets us see the reality of flowing time" (50). I would argue that the waves serve a similar function for Woolf, just as the gyres do for Yeats. The constancy of their rhythm creates a perceived order and consistency, but the image itself and its symbolic resonances defy uniformity. Instead, the waves and the gyres, like the dancer, are able to provide a type of organization but one that ultimately reveals heterogeneous multiplicity rather than homogenous singularity—perpetual but controlled movement.

Reading Yeats

Although these unexpected but striking similarities between Woolf's *The Waves* and Yeats's *A Vision* could be merely coincidental, Woolf's interest in, and appreciation of, Yeats's work at the time of the novel's conception and composition suggests a more engaged intertextual relationship. While there is no evidence that Woolf ever read *A Vision*, her personal library contains seven texts by Yeats, with four of those texts published between 1926 and 1929.[60] During these crucial, productive years, Yeats revised his first edition of *A Vision*, immersed himself in Bergsonian philosophy, and published poems directly influenced by his mystical system. During these same years, Woolf completed *To the Lighthouse*, quickly wrote and published *Orlando*, completed *A Room of One's Own*, and began drafting *The Waves*. It is clear from Woolf's diary entries, letters, and critical essays that she not only read Yeats's work during these years, but found in it an artist who she deeply admired and respected.

As early as September 4, 1924, Woolf answers Jacques Raverat's inquiry about her reading habits by responding, "What do I read? On my table are: Yeats poems" (3: 130). A couple years later, her diary entry from December 11, 1926 reveals that she is reading Yeats's recently published *Autobiographies: Reveries Over Childhood & The Trembling of the Veil*, and she is clearly impacted by it since she observes that "reading Yeats turns my sentences one way: reading Sterne turns them another" (3:119).[61] Then, in April of 1928, when asked once again what she is reading, Woolf remarks in a short piece

[60] For a full list of texts, see Julia King and Laila Miletic-Vejzovic's *The Library of Leonard and Virginia Woolf: A Short-title Catalog.*
[61] Yeats's *Autobiographies: Reveries Over Childhood & The Trembling of the Veil* was originally published in 1914, revised in 1922, and reissued in November of 1926.

for the *New York Herald Tribune* that her interests have turned recently from fiction to autobiography and poetry, particularly the poems of Lady Winchilsea and "Mr Yeats" ("Preferences" 543). She goes on to praise Yeats's work by saying, "Mr Yeats improves poetically as he grows older. *The Tower* contains his best, deepest and most imaginative work" ("Preferences" 543). As the first full volume of poetry published after *A Vision*, *The Tower* is heavily influenced by Yeats's mystical system and even includes poems from *A Vision* like "Leda and the Swan."[62] Woolf's praise of *The Tower* is, therefore, an indirect praise of Yeats's new system—a dualistic system of pattern and order undergirded by perpetual, dynamic movement.

Woolf's admiration of *The Tower* led her to write a review of it for the *Nation & Athenaeum* on April 21, 1928, only a couple months after its Valentine's Day publication. In this brief but insightful review, simply titled "Mr Yeats," Woolf praises the elder poet's work, declaring that "Mr Yeats has never written more exactly and more passionately" (544). She remarks that he is a finer poet in maturity than he was in his youth, and that he has "dried up the Celtic mists" and can now "use his natural voice in speaking and still be musical" (545). Opening her review with a quotation from the title poem "The Tower," Woolf immediately calls attention to Yeats's obsession with time, old age, "and the impediments it brings" (544). As noted in the previous chapter, *The Tower* is a collection of poems that pushes back against Bergsonian flux and the new antithetical age, yearning for timelessness and stability in an illusion of an ordered past. Woolf describes the collection's "remarkable vitality" and remarks, "Instead of the

[62] In the 1925 edition of *A Vision*, the poem "Leda and the Swan" opens Book III but is simply titled "Leda."

acquiescence of old age we have the exacting self-tormenting mood of a man who resents and fights old age, and instead of yielding to it supinely is spurred by it to greater animation than before" (544). In this statement, Woolf perfectly captures the energy of the volume and Yeats's frustration with the paradox of an aging body but an "Excited, passionate, fantastical/ Imagination …" (Yeats, "The Tower" 198).

Woolf then goes on, in wavelike syntax, to praise Yeats for his ability to embody paradox and his vacillating fluidity of scope. She admires his capacity to be "very close and very aloof," to be emotionally and artistically "difficult" but "speak quite simply" (544). Even though her review was written in 1928, the qualities that she admires in Yeats's *The Tower* are qualities that become essential to *The Waves*. She describes the movement and variety of Yeats's poetry in a way that echoes the strengths of her own work: "Now we seem almost to hear some one talking, the verse runs so nervously, so idiomatically; and now we are given lines all grown together with meaning, massive, and incapable of disintegration" (545). To Woolf, his poems fluctuate between fragmentation and unity, the personal and impersonal, in a way that captures the best of both poetry and prose. She identifies "Leda and the Swan," a poem deeply connected to his system in *A Vision*, as one particular example where Yeats "carves as a remote and impersonal an image of beauty as if we were made of spirit and wanted only loveliness to look at" (545).[63] For Woolf, the poems in *The Tower* are "difficult, not through obscurity of language, but because the thought lies deep and turns strangely," a sentiment that once again sounds like it could be a review of her own work (545).

[63] In Yeats's system, Leda's rape gives birth to an antithetical age.

We also know that Woolf had direct contact with Yeats while rewriting *The Waves* in 1930. From her November 8th diary entry, we can discern that Woolf and Yeats spent the previous evening dining together at Lady Ottoline Morrell's with other prominent writers like Walter de la Mare. During this visit, Woolf appears fascinated by Yeats's many ideas and philosophies, perhaps even a little star-struck when she mentions that shaking his hand at the end of the evening made her think, "This is to press a famous hand" (3: 329). In this detailed diary entry, she catalogues Yeats's commentary throughout the evening, noting that he spoke about "dreaming states, & soul states; as others talk of Beaverbrook & free trade—as if matters of common knowledge. So familiar was he, that I perceived that he had worked out a complete psychology, which I could only catch on to momentarily in my alarming ignorance" (3: 329). She also records that he mentioned his theory of subjective and objective epochs, but notes, "Here was another system of thought, of which I could only snatch fragments" (3: 330). She describes her own theories as "crude & jaunty" next to his, and praises Yeats's meticulous systems of order:

> I got a tremendous sense of intricacy of the art; also of its meanings, its seriousness, its importance, which wholly engrosses this large active minded immensely vitalized man. Wherever one cut him, with a little question, he poured, spurted fountains of ideas. And I was impressed by his directness, his terseness. No fluff & dreaminess. (3: 330)

During the meeting, Yeats apparently explained that "All creation is the result of conflict" and praised Eliot and Pound's use of mythologies (3:330). She describes him as "seasoned & generous," and it is clear that she finds him to be confident and capable,

someone to admire (3: 329). In fact, her final description of him in the entry abounds with praise and respect: "Indeed, he seemed very cordial, very generous; having been warmed up by his 65 years; & being in command of all his systems, philosophies, poetics & humanities; not tentative any more" (3: 331).

Although Woolf had not met Yeats in person in over twenty years, it is clear from this diary entry and her review of *The Tower* that he was a writer she greatly admired.[64] In fact, in a letter to Vanessa Bell, written on the same day, she recalls how unexpectedly interesting her evening at Ottoline's was because Yeats was there. Describing him, with mixed praise, to Bell as "(naturally, wrongly) our only living poet—perhaps a great poet: anyhow a good poet," Woolf goes on to recall,

> as he believes in the unconscious soul, in fairies, in magic, and has a complete system of philosophy and psychology—it was not easy to understand: at the same time, I agreed with many of his views; and he also is surprisingly sensible. He has grown tremendously thick, and is rather magnificent looking; in fact seeing how seldom one meets interesting people (with Dolphin away) this was a great success. (4: 250)[65]

While Woolf may not have read or studied *A Vision*, she certainly admired the poems that were a direct product of its system, and her meeting with Yeats in 1930, as she was revising *The Waves*, unquestionably exposed her to many of the text's key ideas, even if the details of the system were not entirely clear.

[64] In the same diary entry from November 8, 1930, Woolf mentions, "Last time I met him [Yeats]--& I may note that he had never heard of me & I was slightly embarrassed by O.'s painstaking efforts to bring me to his notice, was in 1907—or 08 I suppose, at dinner at 46" (3: 329).
[65] "Dolphin" was Woolf's nickname for Vanessa Bell.

Unresolved Tension

While Woolf obviously read Yeats's work closely and admired numerous qualities about the seasoned poet, Yeats was also keenly aware of Woolf's work and her dedication to process, fluidity, and the waves. In the introduction to his 1934 play *Fighting the Waves* he notes that texts like Joyce's *Ulysses* and Woolf's *The Waves* are

> like that of the *Samkara* school of ancient India, mental and physical objects alike material, a deluge of experience breaking over us and within us, melting limits whether of line or tint; man no hard bright mirror dawdling by the dry sticks of a hedge, but a swimmer, or rather the waves themselves. (456)

When Yeats and Woolf met again in 1934, he even told her that he liked her work in *The Waves*, and she notes in her diary that she "felt Yeats' extreme directness, simplicity, & equality: liked his praise; liked him: but cant unriddle the universe at tea" (*Diary* 4: 257).

Although Yeats was connecting Woolf's use of the waves to eastern philosophical thought, the image was also a potent one in scientific circles of the day. Bergson, in fact, began his career as a mathematician rather than a philosopher, and although he is frequently described as anti-scientific—valuing intuition above reason and logic—his metaphysical ideas about time, memory, and matter, were quickly becoming scientific realities, and it seems beyond coincidence that these scientific discoveries were utilizing the wave as their primary means of expression. Daniel Albright connects the scientific to the aesthetic in his foundational monograph *Quantum Poetics* by arguing that when the

wave model of matter replaced the particle model,[66] science as well as literature were transformed. According to Albright, the

> particle model of literature permits the maintenance of many discriminations, many sorts of boundaries; it permits a whole hierarchical literary physics, in which sequences of symbols or images array themselves into larger structures of meaning, comparable to the movement from atom to molecule to crystal. (19)

A wave model of literature, however, is "analogue, not digital, and will tend to abolish boundaries" (Albright 19). Before de Broglie's confirmation of the wave model in 1924, and before particle physics and quantum mechanics revealed "that there is nothing substantial at the heart of things, only some sort of weird dance of energy" (Foley 14), Bergson was questioning the solidity of the atom: "We have no reason, for instance, for representing the atom to ourselves as a solid, rather than as liquid or gaseous, nor for picturing the reciprocal action of atoms by shocks rather than in any other way" (*Matter* 263). Bergson even suggests,

> We may still speak of atoms; the atom may even retain its individuality for our mind which isolates it; but the solidity and the inertia of the atom dissolve either into movements or into lines of force whose reciprocal solidarity brings back to us universal continuity. (*Matter* 265)

Although Bergson is not using the exact language of the wave model in this early work from 1896, he is already conceptualizing matter as a process rather than something stable, observable, and quantitatively measurable.

[66] Physicist Louis de Broglie affirmed the wave model in 1924.

It is this Bergsonian quality of paradoxical complexity that I believe makes the waves such a useful and essential image for Woolf. Like Yeats's geometric, vortical imagery in *A Vision*, the use of the waves allows Woolf a remarkable fluidity of scope, permitting her to move from the natural world of the interludes to the human sphere of the soliloquies, from the personal to the national, and from the objective to the subjective, in a way that privileges active examination and discovery rather than definitiveness; it blurs delineations and constructively complicates dualities. And although this process can be seen as an attempt to order Bergsonian flux—to find a fixed metaphysical pattern in a chaotic world of perpetual change—I would argue instead that these dynamic images call attention to the comforting artifice of perceived order; they concretize a pattern, but one that is cleverly and ironically unstable.

This is perhaps best exemplified in the final moments of the novel. Like the opening interlude, the final soliloquy also blurs the separation between internal and external, with Bernard adopting the language of the natural world and declaring, "And in me too the wave rises. It swells; it arches its back" (297). This is just before the final interlude, and last line, concludes, "*The waves broke on the shore*" (297). In this final line, Woolf perfectly encapsulates the Bergsonian paradox of durational experience—the waves continue with comforting regularity, but the tense suggests that the shift towards stable land has already occurred and the waves are now, as we read the line, receding once again to the sea (297). The movement cannot be captured in the present tense because the moment that we conceive of it, it belongs in the past. Additionally, this final line helps to undermine the cyclical structure of the novel's interludes. Throughout the

novel, each interlude begins with a description of the sun and its expected movement from dawn to dusk. And since the novel begins and ends with an interlude, they appear to represent an ordered, spatialized and cyclical time. This final line, however, is the only interlude which does not begin with the sun. Instead of the comforting version of time that the solar cycle provides, Woolf concludes her text with the vacillating motion of the waves.

Reading this beautifully crafted, experimental novel practically requires a Dramamine at times, with its ebb, flow, and constant oscillation. It is a novel of perpetual movement and change, and it uses the waves as its preferred medium. The image and rhythm of the waves should not be seen as a casual metaphor or even as a significant repeated trope; the wave imagery is the structural, stylistic, and thematic foundation for the novel, and recognizing how it functions and what it allows Woolf to convey deeply enriches our understanding and appreciation of Woolf's most complex and stylistically sophisticated text—a text that Leonard Woolf described as Virginia's "one incontrovertible work of genius" (Glendinning 261).

CHAPTER V

A CENTER THAT CANNOT HOLD: YEATSIAN GYRES IN *THE WAVES*

While the previous chapter outlined Virginia Woolf's admiration for W.B. Yeats and his later modernist work, drawing structural and stylistic connections between *The Waves* and *A Vision*, this chapter seeks to explore in more detail the similarities between Woolf and Yeats's use of pattern and movement. Although most critics add Virginia Woolf to the list of modernist writers that, as Calvin Bedient describes, "raised the conservative hackles in W.B. Yeats because he found their work undefended against chaos," I contend that *The Waves* is a text more closely aligned with Yeats's philosophical system and literary aesthetic than originally assumed (Bedient 2). In addition to the continuously contracting and dilating image of the wave, the image of the gyre—and specifically a Yeatsian model of interlocking, interpenetrating gyres—is also essential to the novel's structure and style. Both the wave and the gyre can be understood as Bergsonian images of multidirectional movement—images that are able to circumvent stasis in favor of mobility and multiplicity and hold binaries in tension with one another without the need for unity or resolution.

Although Michael Whitworth contends that Woolf "celebrates forms of rhythmical order which seem to emerge from chaos itself" and satirizes "imposed systems of order" like those found in Yeats and other male contemporaries (154), I maintain that Yeats's system of order appeals to Woolf because of its fluidity. Yeats's

implementation of overlapping double gyres orders experience in a similar way to Woolf's rhythmic waves. There is a pattern and a regularity in both that appears unified and stable, but there is also an awareness of the illusiveness of that stability as well as a constant tension between opposites which fluctuate and change. These images are useful because of their ability to inhabit paradoxes without resolution. Both the gyre and the wave come close to expressing Bergsonian durational experience because they emphasize process and change above all else.

As Mary Ann Gillies bluntly states, "*The Waves* is a Bergsonian work" (126); it is my hope that by tracing the unexpected similarities between *The Waves* and *A Vision,* we can begin to say with the same certainty that *A Vision* is also a Bergsonian text. Although Woolf is typically seen as an experimental novelist who rejects order and linearity in favor of fluidity, and Yeats is viewed as a traditional poet who privileges structure and form, my argument problematizes these confining descriptions by exposing Woolf's desire for pattern and order and Yeats's dedication to movement and change.

Woolf's essay "Poetry, Fiction and the Future," published in two installments in the *New York Herald Tribune* in August of 1927, outlines the strengths and weaknesses of modern poetry and prose and speaks to Woolf's unexpected dedication to form. In it she argues that the novels of the future must find a way to blur the boundaries of genre, to insert poetry and drama into fiction. In this essay, Woolf provides a remarkably astute analysis of the struggles of the modern writer, and her belief in a discordant, antithetical modern world in need of structure and order is extraordinarily similar to Yeats's recently published system in *A Vision*. Like Yeats, who believed that "all the gains of man come

from conflict with the opposite of his true being" (*AVB* 11), Woolf states, "In the modern mind beauty is accompanied not by its shadow but by its opposite" ("Poetry, Fiction" 433). She explains in this essay that the modern mind struggles to deal with a world of "contrast and collision" (430), and she concludes that modern writers turn to the past because they are "afraid of the present," (432) since the present is disconnected and fractured: "Feelings which used to come simple and separate do so no longer. Beauty is part ugliness; amusement part disgust; pleasure part pain. Emotions which used to enter the mind whole are now broken up on the threshold" (433).

Comparing the modern world to the world of Keats, Woolf notes that Keats experienced the nightingale's song in its entirety, "though it passes from joy in beauty to sorrow at the unhappiness of human fate. He makes no contrast" (433). She compares what she sees as Keats's holistic vision to Eliot's nightingale in *The Waste Land*, arguing that the modern mind "sneers at beauty for being beautiful" and has perhaps "lost the power of accepting anything simply for what it is" (433). Woolf goes on to clarify that this is not necessarily a fault of modern literature. She is not glorifying the poetry and fiction of the past. Instead, she argues that the future of literature, specifically fiction, lies in the alliance of these world views and the flexibility of the artist to move fluidly from the personal to the universal: "It will give the relations of man to Nature, to fate; his imagination; his dreams. But it will also give the sneer, the contrast, the question, the closeness and complexity of life" (436). In this advocacy for the interpenetration of dualities, Woolf sounds once again like Yeats.

Just as Yeats advocated for form and structure in literature, finding fault in the perceived randomness of his younger contemporaries' work, Woolf also claims that "everything in a work of art should be mastered and ordered" (438-39). A phrase like this may seem unusual from a writer like Woolf—whose early work is unquestionably associated with a fluidity and freedom of form. However, her approach to fiction in her later novels, particularly *The Waves*, is much more concerned with the "hidden pattern" that connects all of humanity and sees "the whole world is a work of art" ("A Sketch" 72). In "Poetry, Fiction and the Future," she uses Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* to illustrate her points, praising it for the way it seamlessly blends poetry with prose but criticizing its lack of drama and warning novelists to avoid Sterne's "narrative shapelessness" (Graham 20). This reference to Sterne is illuminating particularly because only six months earlier Woolf notes in her diary that "reading Yeats turns my sentences one way: reading Sterne turns them another" (3:119). Utilizing her familiar syntactical pattern of vacillation, Woolf establishes Yeats and Sterne as stylistic contraries. Therefore, if Woolf is cautioning novelists in this essay to avoid Sterne's looseness, arguing instead that "art should be mastered and ordered," she is indirectly advocating for the tightness of form that Yeats's work provides.

As discussed in the previous chapter, it is clear that Woolf read and admired Yeats's work in the years leading up to her composition of *The Waves*. She also met the older poet on November 7, 1930 at the party of a friend, where Yeats spoke extensively about his philosophical system and praised younger poets like Eliot and Pound for their use of mythology. Woolf confesses in her diary that she "was impressed by his

directness, his terseness," and observes, "He seemed to live in the centre of an immensely intricate briar bush; from wh. he could issue at any moment; & then withdraw again" (3:330). It seems fitting that even in Woolf's description of Yeats she utilizes an image of undulation since so much of his work, and her own, follows this similar pattern.

Vortical Movement

Although the image and movement of the waves is the primary structural and stylistic undercurrent at work in Woolf's novel, the gyre is also an important and overlooked image present within *The Waves*. Like the waves, the gyre is a dynamic image of contraction and expansion; it is concrete, but it is also a force, and Woolf employs it in a way that is similar to her use of the waves. And although the use of the vortex is prevalent throughout much of the modernist works of Woolf's contemporaries, Woolf's use of the image seems more closely linked with the mystical double gyre found in W.B. Yeats's *A Vision*.

Originally published in 1926, when Woolf was first beginning to conceptualize *The Waves*, Yeats's *A Vision* depicts the image of a double gyre with "subjectivity and objectivity as intersecting states struggling one against the other" (*AVB* 52). Often quoting the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus, a proponent of universal change, Yeats describes in detail an image of two overlapping vortexes, "one gyre within the other always" (*AVB* 50). Labelling these gyres the Antithetical and the Primary, Yeats goes on to suggest that as one gyre weakens, or contracts, the other strengthens and expands. The objective Primary gyre represents order and the subjective Antithetical gyre is associated with discord. These dualistic, interpenetrating gyres are then further composed of another

pair of opposites which "whirl in contrary directions" (*AVB* 54). Yeats's explanation of the gyres is complex and extensive, rooted in mysticism and metaphysics, but it is this quality of simultaneous movement between dualities that seems strikingly similar to Woolf's waves and Bergson's conceptualization of *durée.* In *Creative Evolution*, for example, Henri Bergson states,

> It is true that in the universe itself two opposite movements are to be distinguished […] 'descent' and 'ascent.' The first only unwinds a roll ready prepared. In principle, it might be accomplished almost instantaneously, like releasing a spring. But the ascending movement, which corresponds to the inner work of ripening or creating, endures essentially, and imposes its rhythm on the first, which is inseparable from it. (10)

One can see in this particular Bergsonian example the tension between contraries and the overlap between the rise and fall of the wave and the winding and unwinding of the gyre. The movements are unique, but they function in a metaphorically analogous way.

Like the wave, the gyre, or whirlpool, functions simultaneously on a structural, stylistic, and thematic level. Its movement is similar to the ebb and flow of the waves, with an emphasis on contraction and dilation, a constant focusing and expanding force. At times, the six individual soliloquies that dominate the unusual narrative of the novel seem to swirl around a particular thought or activity, with images and phrases repeated from one person to the next. At other times, these different types of undulating and vacillating movements are used within the same description. For example, when Neville is on the train, leaving school and his fellow classmates, he describes the "swarms of people" (71) and the "surge of the sea" before proclaiming, "We are whirled asunder" (72). Frequently the wave and the gyre are even syntactically allied. In an early interlude,

for example, Woolf writes, "The waves drummed on the shore, like turbaned warriors, like turbaned men with poisoned assegais who, whirling their arms on high, advance upon the feeding flocks, the white sheep" (75). By repeatedly joining these two images of multidirectional movement, Woolf calls attention to their similarities, exposing a potential relationship between her text and Yeats's work in *A Vision*.

These undulating and eddying images and ideas can be seen together in multiple places within *The Waves*, but one of the most striking is when Jinny is on the train, leaving her friends and heading home from school for the summer: "We flash past signal-boxes; we make the earth rock slightly from side to side. The distance closes for ever in a point; and we for ever open the distance wide again. The telegraph poles bob up incessantly; one is felled, another rises" (62-3). In addition to the usual cadence of the waves' rise and fall, this scene also includes the double gyre—a closing inward followed by a widening outward.

This image is echoed immediately by the tunnel and the transformative role it plays in Jinny's development. She enters the tunnel as a young school girl, but while she's in the tunnel, she exchanges glances with a gentleman who makes her conscious of her body and her sexuality. When Jinny emerges from the tunnel, she metaphorically opens. She is aware of herself as a woman and states, "And I lie back; I give myself up to rapture" (63). However, when a "sour woman" judges her for her indulgence, Jinny proclaims, "My body shuts in her face, impertinently, like a parasol. I open my body, I shut my body at my will" (63-4). The dilation and contraction of her body coupled with the movement of the train through the tunnel is linked with the motion of the waves and

the focused energy of the gyre. This particular scene in the novel perfectly exemplifies the tension Woolf creates between order and flux. Although I agree with Mary Ann Gillies when she claims that Woolf "chose to write about the inner life; to depict this as fluid, chaotic, and continually mobile; to insist that real living occurred in extraordinary moments of being in which time was conflated and all moments existed simultaneously" (131), I would add that Woolf's description is not without pattern or structure. It enforces fluidity and change, but it does so through the recurrent movement of waves and gyres.

Throughout *The Waves*, this emphasis on order, stability, and fixity in the face of perpetual change manifests in many forms, from the structure to the style, but one peculiar syntactical example comes through the simple repetition of the word "Now." Remarkably used over *five hundred times* in the novel, the seemingly inconsequential word "now" takes on multiple levels of significance. It appears in both the interludes and the character's soliloquies, frequently beginning a new sentence, demarcating a new speaker, or introducing a series of actions or observations: "Now we stop at station after station, rolling out milk cans. Now women kiss each other and help with baskets. Now I will let myself lean out of the window" (62). Jinny also states, "There! That is my moment of ecstasy. Now it is over" (104). A linguistically slippery word, "now" can be used as a noun, an adverb, or a conjunction, but in all three parts of speech, it invariably calls attention to the present moment. Woolf's overuse of this word, however, ironically destabilizes the present. It is as if the author is trying to call the present moment into existence, to insist on its fixity through some form of verbal declaration.

Through this repetitive announcement, however, the word "now" begins to lose its meaning, to depict movement and change rather than fixity because as Bergson maintained "repetition and recontextualization defamiliarizes language and thus, ironically, makes it new" (Douglass 120). By frequently using the word as a conjunction at the beginning of a sentence, the word "now" no longer emphasizes the present moment; instead, it links one moment to the next, suggesting continued movement rather than stasis. Initially, the word might invoke a stable, measurable present moment, but the repetition undermines that stability and calls attention to a present that never actually exists. By exposing the illusory nature of the present moment, Woolf is making a distinctly Bergsonian move, perceiving that it "is always difficult to attend to the here and now because firstly there *is* no here and now, only continual movement, and secondly, we have an innate orientation towards the future" (Foley 62). Even the use of past tense in the interludes and soliloquies reinforces this absence of the present, and it is clear from Woolf's diary entries that she struggled with questions regarding the nature of life's permanence and the stability of the self:

> Now is life very solid, or very shifting? I am haunted by the two contradictions. This has gone on for ever: will last forever; goes down to the bottom of the world—this moment I stand on. Also it is transitory, flying, diaphanous. I shall pass like a cloud on the waves. Perhaps it may be that though we change; one flying after another, so quick so quick, yet we are somehow successive, & continuous [...]. (3: 218)

Woolf's willingness to conceptualize experience as both random and continuous is indicative of the Bergsonian philosophy that undergirds *The Waves*. Like Yeats, Woolf

does not rule in favor of order over disorder, nor does she choose fragmentation rather than unity. Instead, she allows these paradoxes to exist in tension and without resolution, utilizing waves and gyres as imagistic vehicles of representation.

This desperate need for order, however, is also conveyed through the thoughts and desires of the six main characters who "are caught within the most basic and most irresolvable questions of ontology—what it means to be and how one goes about that business" (Lucenti 75). For example, using specifically Bergsonian language, Louis concludes, "I am conscious of flux, of disorder; of annihilation and despair. If this is all, this is worthless. Yet I feel, too, the rhythm of the eating-house. It is like a waltz tune, eddying in and out, round and round" (93). Again, Woolf's carefully crafted syntactical configuration joins the movement of the waves with that of a gyre. For Louis, the waves, with their repetition and rhythm, become a comfort—a way to order the unrest of lived experience. He goes on to declare that he is not blind to the "perpetual disorder," but he attempts to control and structure it, repeating the phrase, "I will reduce you to order" (94 & 95). Woolf's interest in a metaphysically patterned universe that provides stability and comfort is seen in her autobiographical essay, "A Sketch of the Past," where she states,

> It is only by putting it into words that I make it whole; this wholeness means that it has lost its power to hurt me; it gives me, perhaps because by doing so I take away the pain, a great delight to put the severed parts together. Perhaps this is the strongest pleasure known to me. It is the rapture I get when in writing I seem to be discovering what belongs to what; making a scene come right; making a character come together. (72)

Woolf's delight in crafting order and discovering patterns is once again reminiscent of Yeats's mystical system in *A Vision,* where individual personalities and historical epochs

are literally charted and meticulously organized. However, both Woolf and Yeats recognize this ordering as an artistic practice that is necessary but artificial. It is a process that provides security in the face of chaos, but it does not escape or alter that chaos. It creates, and through that linguistic composition, the fluidity of experience is momentarily and comfortably contained.

As the previous excerpt from "A Sketch of the Past" reveals, Woolf also struggles to deal with the paradoxical relationship between unity and fragmentation, creating in *The Waves* six individual characters who are unique but also splinters of one unified consciousness. Each character throughout the text struggles with this need to assert independence, but it is perhaps most obvious when Bernard declares, "I am Bernard; I am Byron; I am this, that and the other" (89). He goes on to say, "For I am more selves than Neville thinks. We are not simple as our friends would have us to meet their needs" (89). Moments later, Bernard states that Neville "snatches the poker and with one blow destroys that momentary appearance of solidity in the burning coals. All changes" (90). The shift from a stable, unified sense of self to fragments of ash blowing in the wind is sudden and seemingly inevitable. Bernard acknowledges that solidity is only a "momentary appearance," but he still seems crushed by the admittance that "All changes." Lisa Marie Lucenti argues that "Bernard takes pleasure not in diffuse and uncontainable multiplicity, but in a highly regulated miming of it" (87). He is compelled to assert his sense of self, but like Jinny and the other characters, he realizes that "There

is nothing staid, nothing settled in the universe. All is rippling, all is dancing; all is quickness and triumph" (46). The "I" that each character avows "can only ever be a temporary linguistic embodiment" (Lucenti 78).

Whirling Around Percival

Where each character appears to find stability is not within themselves but is curiously through a unity with the seventh, silent character of Percival. In fact, echoing Bernard's earlier thoughts, Louis explains that

> It is Percival […] who makes us aware that these attempts to say, 'I am this, I am that,' which we make, coming together, like separated parts of one body and soul, are false […] From the desire to be separate we have laid stress upon our faults, and what is particular to us. But there is a chain whirling around, round, in a steel-blue circle beneath. (137)

Neville also declares, "'I am this; I am that!' Speech is false" (138). Although Percival is described and praised by all of the characters, the reader never hears directly from him. Percival's personality is filtered through the varying perspectives of the six voices, and the reader's understanding of him is, therefore, completely reliant upon the subjective opinions of each character. He is depicted as the seventh petal of the red carnation, "a whole flower to which every eye brings its own contribution" (*The Waves* 127). Percival's position in the text is certainly essential, but unlike many critics who argue that he is the silent unifier of the narrative—the "fulcrum of their group"(Sudipta 152)— I contend that he is actually the false center of a whirling double gyre, a delusive center that promises stability and cohesion but exemplifies uncontainable fluidity.

Structurally, Percival is at the nucleus of the novel, with the six characters vacillating around him—drawn together for his departure, dispersed once he leaves, and linked again through his death. His death occurs at the half way point in the novel when "[t]*he sun had risen to its full height*" (148). The movement of the entire novel, in fact, contracts and dilates around Percival, an act that is exemplified in microcosm when Rhoda compares him to "a stone fallen into a pond round which minnows swarm. Like minnows, we who had been shooting this way, that way, all shot round him when he came. Like minnows, conscious of the presence of a great stone, we undulate and eddy contently" (136). In this image, we see the waves and the gyre syntactically aligned once more. The chaos of the minnows darting in various uncontrolled directions, echoing the unpredictable Bergsonian flux, becomes ordered because of the stone. Percival brings them together into a systematic pattern, but, ironically, he does not sustain them. For if we accept that Percival genuinely unifies the group, then Woolf's metaphor here falls apart. Minnows might swarm around a stone dropped in the water, but they would only do so because they thought it was nourishment. They might swirl around contently at first, but eventually they will realize that their imagined sustenance is only a stone.

The image and vacillating movement of the vortex also increases as the group gets closer and closer to their dinner with Percival. Leading up to their dinner, there seems to be a whirling and concentrating force, an anticipation, felt especially from Neville who keeps looking to see if Percival has arrived. There is a dynamic, almost dizzying, frenzy of swirling gyres, cyclical movement, and contracting and dilating waves. In this scene of expectancy, the tension between unity and fracture is stylistically

articulated through this constant oscillating movement. For example, when Louis describes London and the swirling cacophony of the city, he states, "All are merged in one turning wheel of single sound. All separate sounds—wheels, bells, the cries of drunkards, of merrymakers—all churned into one sound, steel blue, circular" (135). This description of cyclical unification is, however, far from stable or static. It is not merely a circle but a wheel, and the sounds achieve a sense of unity only through an active process of churning. This process of unification is also immediately undercut by separation: "Then a siren hoots. At that shores slip away, chimneys flatten themselves, the ship makes for open sea" (135). Percival's departure appears to be the catalyst for both the unification and separation of the six main characters, and, as always, Woolf's careful attention to diction and syntax underscores Percival's paradoxical role in the text.

While waiting for Percival to arrive, Neville laments that "Percival is going," which is a seemingly simple declaration with syntactically complex connotations. By using "is," Woolf is partly calling attention to a present state of being; however, using "is" as a linking verb and copula connected to "going," syntactically links a state of being to process rather than permanency. Interestingly, Neville also makes his declaration, "Percival is going," before Percival even arrives for the dinner (135). He is, of course, referring to Percival's departure for India, but Woolf's placement of this phrase subtly anticipates a sense of departure prior to arrival— an inherent tension between conflicting forms of movement that once again mimic the waves and deny stasis. Once Percival arrives and Neville declares "He is here," everyone begins to feel control and stability (140). The vortex narrows to a point, providing the illusion of order and cohesion.

Interestingly, there is a profound sense of possibility and infinite time in these contracted moments. Jinny states, "All is real; all is firm without shadow or illusion," and notes that "Days and days are to come" (141). At the thought of Percival's arrival, Neville states, "now we are together. But without Percival there is no solidity. We are silhouettes, hollow phantoms moving mistily without a background" (122). With Percival, however, Neville eagerly proclaims, "The reign of chaos is over. He has imposed order" (122). Although it might be tempting to believe the characters and position Percival in the role of stable unifier, I agree with Lucenti that, "Where self-congruence is constantly slipping away, we try to stop the flow by imagining an originary center—Percival is that phantom" (92).

From a Bergsonian perspective, Percival is not solid or stabilizing; he is a fabricated mosaic of other people's thoughts and impressions. Neville admits at one point that "the person is always changing," (129) and because of this, he declares, "I am never stagnant; I rise from my worst disasters, I turn, I change" (130). Utilizing once again the motion of the waves and the gyre together, Woolf has Neville admit that individuals are in a constant state of becoming. All six of the characters change and mature throughout the text, though perhaps not in the usual format of the typical bildungsroman.[67] They have unique and defining personalities, but their personalities are also complex and overlapping. Sometimes they speak as others expect, and sometimes they present a different self than the description assigned to them.

[67] Since *The Waves* does follow the development of six characters from childhood through adulthood, it could be considered as an example of a bildungsroman. However, the voices and ideas of Woolf's characters do not reflect that progression. Instead, the voices and thoughts of the children are just as articulate and complex as those of the adults. In this way, Woolf deviates from the linearity of the traditional bildungsroman formula.

Percival's character, however, is described with perfect consistency. He is seen by all six characters as a man of action—a sportsman, a leader, and a hero. He is the typical alpha male, one of the "boasting boys," whose physicality is in direct contrast to the three main male voices in the text (46). He is the figure that physically brings them all together, but that unity is never complete and never lasting. He is never given a voice, never allowed to speak or internalize emotion or experience; he is only seen and understood through external snapshots in time. He is entirely a collaborative, fictive creation. Even Jinny acknowledges this when she pleads, "Let us hold it for one moment […] this globe whose walls are made of Percival, of youth and beauty, and something so deep sunk within us that we shall perhaps never make this moment out of one man again" (145). Woolf's use of the word "make" here is essential because she calls attention to Percival as a composition, an idea that Bernard validates when he describes "the swelling and splendid moment created by us from Percival" (146). Although Percival appears to embody unity, he actually "points to the novel's refusal of centric views and meanings—he is a parody of centers" (Lucenti 92).

It is through this parody that Woolf is able to explore the repercussions of fluid identity and critique the problematic notion of a stable, immutable self. Even Percival's name calls attention to his ironic instability. His name most likely alludes to the national myth of Parsifal, a knight in King Arthur's court who is responsible for healing the Wounded King that guards the entrance to the Waste Land, an action that allows him to obtain the holy Grail and subsequently flood the Waste Land with water, reviving it from a barren land to a luxurious garden (Matthews 7). As John Matthews points out, the quest

for the grail is depicted in numerous legends, both pagan and Christian, but "the objective remained the same: a spiritual goal representing inner wholeness, union with the divine, self-fulfillment" (5). In this way, Percival can be construed as a mythic unifier, an idealized image of national heroism and purity.

However, in Woolf's employment of Eliot's "mythic method," she cleverly utilizes a figure whose fabled narrative is deeply fragmented. In some legends, Parsifal is one of the few knights to actually reach the grail. However, in other legends, he is unable to heal the Wounded King, and is, therefore, responsible for the barrenness of the Waste Land. Chrétien de Troyes's twelfth-century romance was left unfinished, and within fifty years four separate poets took up the tale, each presenting a different version of events. Wolfram von Eschenbach, for example, makes Parzival into an ideal twelfth-century knight, and intriguingly interprets Parzival's name to mean "*perce á val*, the one piercing through the middle of the valley, going between the pair of opposites" (Campbell 247). This fragmented collaboration of the myth is essential to understanding Woolf's utilization of Percival. From one perspective, he is the magnificent "mediaeval commander" that Bernard sees him as (37): "He is conventional; he is a hero" (*The Waves* 123). However, Woolf subtly suggests through her mythic allusion that Percival, like his legendary namesake, may not be a hero at all.

Since Percival is presented as a stereotypically masculine hero, leaving his country to serve in India, it is impossible to disregard his symbolic association with England and the British Empire. The language of war and battle is evident throughout the novel, although the historical presence of war does not figure into the "plot" as directly as

it does in other novels like *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*. War and colonization, however, are present in the background of the text, and Percival serves as the novel's imperial icon. The reoccurring image of Percival as a leader with troops connects him with England's militaristic role as colonizer of foreign lands, and Bernard's imagined description of him in India hyperbolically elevates Percival above his station:

> Percival rides a flea-bitten mare, and wears a sun-helmet. By applying the standards of the West, by using the violent language that is natural to him, the bullock-cart is righted in less than five minutes. The Oriental problem is solved. He rides on; the multitude cluster round him, regarding him as if he were—what indeed he is—a God. (*The Waves* 136)

In this depiction, Woolf allows the reader to see the ridiculous grandiosity of British national identity. Even though Percival is merely a cog in the mechanism of empire, Bernard imagines him as the savior of the east, the one who can humorously solve the "Oriental problem" in one simple gesture.

And although Bernard believes in the reality of his perception, Woolf allows the reader to recognize the depiction as deeply flawed and ironic. Percival leaves England and his six friends in order to represent his nation in India, but instead of dying in a glorious and heroic battle, he is merely thrown from his horse: "This is the truth. This is a fact. His horse stumbled; he was thrown. […] He died where he fell" (151). In the original draft of the text, Woolf even includes that his horse tripped over a molehill, so she is obviously calling attention to the ordinariness, the ridiculousness, of his death (Beer 84). As Julia Briggs points out, Woolf disapproved of a certain kind of history, "history as the 'lives of great men,' of heroes and hero-worship […] with its emphasis on

the lives of men of action, and its indifference to the lives of the obscure and of women" ("The Novels" 78). Through the depiction of Percival as a false center in this whirling gyre of personal identity and selfhood, Woolf is subtly shattering the stability of British identity. She is calling attention to Britishness as a fictive composition or perceived order—a system that is comfortable and safe because it presents an illusion of permanence.

Woolf's destruction of this seemingly stable national identity is directly related to her embrace of Bergsonian fluidity and her position as a female writer. As a woman, Woolf is limited and constrained by patriarchal categorizations. Since she wrote *A Room of One's Own* at the same time that she drafted *The Waves*, we know that the confinement and oppression of women—specifically women authors—was at the foreground of her thoughts. She recognized that the masculine order that governed and controlled the British Empire and British literary tradition was not an advantage to her as a female author. She needed freedom to create, but that freedom was only possible through stability. Unlike her contemporaries, who advocated for newness via tradition, Woolf recognized that female writers lacked the opportunities to create, and when they did create, there was a remarkable dearth of tradition to utilize. This at first proved problematic because Woolf believed that men and women "need different sentences to contain the shapes of their experiences" (Gordon x). However, this lack of stability also allows for freedom of experimentation. Without an extensive female tradition to pull from, Woolf can explore new forms and styles. In this way, a lack of order is filled with nascent potentiality. Woolf's statement in *A Room of One's Own*, "I thought how

unpleasant it is to be locked out; and I thought how it is worse perhaps to be locked in," speaks to her willingness to embrace a Bergsonian world of perpetual change that destabilizes categories and delineations, including nationalistic ones (24).

For Woolf, a blurring of categorization can be productive and beneficial, which perhaps partially explains her openness to Bergsonian theory. This same clouding of categories, however, is exactly why Bergson's ideas are potentially threatening for an Irish writer like W. B. Yeats. For an Irishman like Yeats, a stable and separate national—and more importantly, cultural—identity is essential. After all, he spent his entire career dedicated to an Irish literary and cultural revival distinct from British tradition. A loss of categories, and an acceptance of constant change, potentially undermines his work with cultural nationalism and partially explains his resistance to Bergsonian fluidity. Both Woolf and Yeats create literary worlds in conflict. They position dualities against each other but without resolution. Although Woolf may be more receptive to Bergson's theories while Yeats may be more reluctant, they both experiment with systems of pattern and order undergirded by dynamic multidirectional movement. It is this shared interest in a paradoxically ordered system that privileges movement and multiplicity which places these seemingly disparate modernist authors in a productive critical dialogue—one that unexpectedly revolves around the philosophies of Henri Bergson.

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