

Re-Reading W. B. Yeats's "The Statues"*

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Abstract: I try to differently re-read "The Statues." Wilson sees it as Yeats's worst poem in *ottava rima*, which I refute. It treats the movement of civilization, from Egypt to Greece, India, and Ireland, in finest form; it is *intentionally* asymmetrical. It is, in fact, one of Yeats's finest achievements in his poetic work: in form, says Ellmann, it is like "bamboo shoots" he has drawn so many times he has no need to look at a bamboo, in content it is the heart of the philosophical system polished over the long span of his life. I also read Stallworthy's and Jeffares's transcriptions of the prose draft of this poem; Yeats did not seem to pay attention to the sentences, except for the ideas in it.

Key words: Yeats, Ellmann, Jeffares, Jon Stallworthy, Daniel Albright

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제목: W. B. 예이츠의 "조상" 다시 읽기

우리말 요약: 이 논문은 예이츠의 "조상"을 다시 읽는다. 월슨이 이 시를 예이츠의 오타 리마형식으로는 최악의 시로 보는 견해를 반박한다. 이 시는 『환상록』의 원리인 문명의 이동, 즉 이집트, 그리스, 인디아, 아일랜드로의 이동을 의도된 불균형의 형식미로 엮어낸 최상의 시이다. 즉, 이 시는 예이츠의 최고의 시들 중의 하나이다. "조상"은, 형식으로 보면, 엘만의 지적처럼, 예이츠가 수없이 많이 그린 대나무 그림처럼 이제 더 이상 대나무를 볼 필요가 없이 그린 대나무 그림과 같으며, 내용상으로는, 평생을 닦은 철학적 체계의 심장이다. 본 논문은 또한 스톨위시와 제페어스의 시의 산문 초안도 검토하는데 예이츠는 거기서 문장의 형식에는 개의치 않고 개념들을 정리한 것 같다.

주제어: 예이츠, 엘만, 제페어즈, 존 스톨위시, 대니얼 올브라트

저자: 이영석은 한양대학교 영어영문학과와 시창작과 영시 담당 교수이다. 그는 시인이며 화가이다.

* This work was supported by the research fund of Hanyang University (HY-2011-G).

I Introduction

Yeats's "The Statues" is one of Yeats's last poems: it was written on 9 April 1938 and first published in *London Mercury* and the *Nation* on 15 April 1939.¹⁾ It is not difficult to assume that this poem is representative of his last poetic theory and practice; Ellmann's insight into the characteristics of Yeats's last poetic practice is worth our attention:

Like the Chinese artist, who paints bamboo shoots for ten years and wins the freedom of never having to look at a bamboo shoot again, Yeats knew that his long apprenticeship was over and that he had at last learned to his own satisfaction how to write. His mastery of his craft is nonchalant. (191)

I would like to study how "The Statues" was conceived, as well as how it has been read by major critics. We have accumulated a lot of criticism on this poem, but my essay will pay attention to some major critics's comments and criticism. Based on their interpretations, I will further read the whole poem in form and content. I hope I could have a broader perspective of this poem and a new objective re-reading of the poem itself.

First and foremost, what did Yeats intend to say in this poem? In his last years he did not seem to have to go back to the poems and rework them, as he had usually done. The first prose draft of this poem is, therefore, important when we want to understand the final version of the poem. Scholars had some difficulty in reading Yeats's notoriously illegible hand-written draft, which is not easy to decipher. For instance, A. Norman Jeffares's transcription of this particular poem differs from that of Jon Stallworthy's in *Vision and Revision in Yeats's "Last Poem."* I have italicized the variant readings of both scholars, for an easy comparison:

First, Jeffares's transcription:

I. They went out in noonday or under the new moon moving *with --- [indecipherable] only forms in marble*, empty faces, *measure* Pythagorean perfection only that which is incapable of *show* is infinite in passion. *Only* passion sees God. Men were *victors* at Salamis, and *Victory is* nothing, now one up, then another, only their cold marble forms could drive back *to* the vague Asiatic *norm*. *Only they could* beat down Nature with their certainty. Weary of victory one *went* far from all his companions and sat so long in solitude that his *body* became soft and round, incapable of work or war, because his eyes were empty, more empty than skies at night . . . all men worshipped present deity. *Apollo* forgot Pythagoras and took the name of Buddha which was victorious Greece in the Asiatic mode. Others *stayed* away and were made --- [indecipherable] and conquer their sublime emptiness, and in a jungle night they saw --- [indecipherable].

II. Where are you now? *It is better* that you shed the sunburn and become pale-white; did you appear in the Post Office in 1916? Is it true that Pearse called on you by *the* name of Cuchulain. Certainly we have need of you. The vague flood is at its . . . For from all quarters is coming . . . Come back with your Pythagorean numbers. (Jeffares 412)

Stallworthy's transcription:

[I] They went out *in broad day or under the moon* Moving *with dream certainty* . . . empty faces, *measured* Pythagorean perfection; only that which is incapable of *thought* is infinite in passion; only passion sees God. Men were *victorious* at Salamis, & *human victories* are nothing, now one up, then another; & only those cold marble forms could *drive back* the vague, asiatic *hoard*; beat down multiform Nature with their certainty

[II] Weary of victory one was far from all his companions - & sat so long in solitude, that *his once athletic* body became soft & round incapable of work or war, because his eyes were empty, more empty than the skies at night . . . *Apolo* forgot Pythagoras & took the name of Buddha which was victorious Greece in the asiatic [mode]? Others had stayed away & . . . they saw marble put forth many heads & feet

[III] Where are you now. Is it true that you shed the sun-burn & become pale white; Did you appear in the Post Office in 1916 is it true that Pearse called on you *by name of Cuchullain* Certainly we have need of you. The vague flood is at its *Height . . . from* all four quarters is coming Come back with all your Pythagorean numbers. (qtd Albright 822; Stallworthy, *VR* 125-26).

Let me try to grasp what Yeats's prose blueprint of "The Statutes" is saying on the basis of what both scholars transcribed:

There must be three divisions, marked I, II, and III:

[I] 1st sentence:

They went out in broad day or under the moon (Stallworthy; abbreviated as S).
They went out in noonday or under the new moon (Jeffares; abbreviated as J):

The two scholars' variant readings are puzzling; why are they so different?; but anyway: "broad day" and "noonday"; "under the moon" and "under the new moon." It is clear they went out during the day or night. "They" in the poem refers, I think, to the people in general and to "boys and girls pale from the imagined love/ Of solitary bed" as well. That is, people stare at the (Greek) statues, and of them, young boys and girls go out at night and

"place/ Live lips upon a plummet-measured face."

2nd sentence: Moving *with dream certainty* . . . empty faces, *measured* Pythagorean perfection; only that which is incapable of *thought* is infinite in passion; only passion sees God (S).

moving *with --- [indecipherable] only forms in marble*, empty faces, *measure* Pythagorean perfection only that which is incapable of *show* is infinite in passion. *Only* passion sees God (J).

Stallworthy sees it as one sentence, while Jeffares sees it as three, but both scholars seem to think that there are three thought groups. Stallworthy: actually "only passion sees God." is a complete sentence, and the rest is not a sentence but two phrases containing ideas and images. "Moving with dream certainty"? What is it? They moved with certainty dreaming? My best guess is: they moved dreaming, certainly with empty faces. Who measured Pythagorean perfection? "Only that which is incapable of thought is infinite in passion; only passion sees God." seems logical. "The 'measured Pythagorean perfection' 'that which is incapable of thought is infinite in passion'": does it mean that the sculptures of perfect measurements are incapable of thought but infinite in passion? I tend to disagree. My reading: the subject is implied. That is, a *Greek sculptor* measured and made a face of Pythagorean perfection, which is incapable of thought, and which is incapable of infinite passion; however, he (Yeats) believes that only passion sees God. That is, boys and girls show up under the moon and kiss the perfectly sculpted face, that is, "only passion sees God." But there is a problem with "empty faces," which both scholars transcribe." Whose faces are they? The faces of the Greek youngsters or those of statues'? Maybe, the faces of both the youngsters' and statues' are implied in the final poem, if not in the draft. The Greek boys and girls are not only pale faced but also empty faced,

probably because of passion. The adjective “empty” takes another dimension in the later part of the finished poem, meaning “enlightened,” as I will discuss the poem itself below. In addition, Yeats mentions something about the faces somewhere, “faces which are divine because all ... is empty and measured (qtd Jeffares 412; *Exploration* 451).

3rd sentence: Men were *victorious* at Salamis, & *human victories* are nothing, now one up, then another; & only those cold marble forms could *drive back* the vague, asiatic *hoard* [*horde?*]; beat down multiform Nature with their certainty (S).

Men were *victors* at Salamis, and *Victory is* nothing, now one up, then another, only their cold marble forms could drive back *to* the vague Asiatic *norm* [*horde*]. *Only they could* beat down Nature with their certainty (J).

Both scholars’s transcriptions are almost identical, except “drive back the vague, asiatic hoard” (S) in contrast to “drive back to the vague Asiatic norm” (J). I think “hoard” or “norm” seems very different, but if it [*horde*] is in script, it may look like “norm”; if it is, it is “horde” rather than Stallworthy’s “hoard.” The difference between Stallworthy’s “hoard” and Jeffares’s “norm” produces a total contrast, two opposite meanings. Stallworthy’s transcription asks us to read that those cold marble forms were able to drive back the vague, asiatic hoard [*horde*]. The Greek statues or art could beat down the Asiatic invasion. In the meantime, Jeffares’s asks us to read that their cold marble forms could have driven back to the vague Asiatic norm, but that they did not do so. The former reading says that there was not the Asiatic influence on Greek art, but the latter reading says that it would have been better if Greek art had received Asiatic influence, while the latter reading is not factual, according to Yeats’s comment on this poem’s meaning somewhere else. The variant readings of this part lead to two

different readings of the finished poem.

[II] 4th sentence:

Weary of victory one was far from all his companions - & sat so long in solitude, that *his once athletic* body became soft & round incapable of work or war, because his eyes were empty, more empty than the skies at night . . . *Apolo* forgot Pythagoras & took the name of Buddha which was victorious Greece in the asiatic [mode]? (S)

Weary of victory one *went* far from all his companions and sat so long in solitude that his *body* became soft and round, incapable of work or war, because his eyes were empty, more empty than skies at night . . . *all men worshipped present deity*. *Apollo* forgot Pythagoras and took the name of Buddha which was victorious Greece in the Asiatic mode. (J)

Both scholars's readings are identical (except that Jeffares's is longer than Stallworthy's, which is quoted in Albright's *W. B. Yeats: The Poems*), but Stallworthy uses the division of this portion by "II," while Jeffares does not divide this portion, which is important. Stallworthy must have thought of the division's significance: here "one" means the young Siddhartha. Actually this consists of two sentences linked with ". . ." which talk about the Buddha-to-be. The first sentence is about the prince Siddhartha (the name means one who achieves one's aim) who left "all his companions" in pursuit of his enlightenment, who became a Buddha (the one who is the first awakened being). Stallworthy has succeeded in reading two more words, "once athletic": "his *once athletic* body became soft and round." Now Siddhartha sat so long in solitude, and his eyes turned more empty than skies at night. He is a Greek god (Apollo)-turned Buddha, an enlightened one. The victorious Greece, which refers to Alexander the Great's conquest of India, has made a new god Buddha in the Asiatic mode.

5th sentence: Others had stayed away & . . . they saw marble put forth many heads & feet (S).

Others had stayed away & . . . they saw marble put forth many heads & feet (J).

Both scholars's reading is the same: Others (people) see marble become statues.

[III] Both scholars read the last section in the same way. That is, the poet wishes to have a statue of Ireland made pursuant to the numbers of Pythagoras for his own time.

II. Major Readings

Critics have discussed this poem a lot.

According to Ellmann, "The Statues"'s European point of view is compared with "Meru"'s Asian point of view (188). Ellmann, in Yeats's shoes, opines that

. . . Asia and Europe are usually less compatible. Europe could learn much from the East, but should not become Eastern. Yeats foresaw a dominantly Asiatic era to come with loathing. In Asia triumphant the vagueness and generalization which he had always hated would take on inter-continental proportions. Already in his last years he saw literature and life bent headlong towards the East. The school of Auden, Lewis, and MacNeice heralded an Asiatic era, he contended, for they had 'thrown off too much, as I think, the old metaphors, the sensuous tradition of the poets', and the masterpiece they might produce would be half-Asiatic. In the writings of Pound, Virginia Woolf, and Joyce, he thought he perceived a destruction of the conscious mind's intelligible structure, a loss of conscious control to the point almost of automatism. (187)

According to Ellmann's reading of "The Statues" (188-90), in stanzas one and two, "Yeats finds the genesis of Europe in the numbers of Pythagoras" [in stanza two] (188) and currently, "Greek boys and girls fell in love by seeing in each other's eyes the beauty of some statue of Phidias" (188); in stanza three, "Yeats describes how the Greek sculptors' image of man followed Alexander's armies into India" (189); in the final stanza "comes the 'heroic cry.'" (189) The poem illustrates what Yeats thinks about the movement of civilization.

Unterecker thinks "The Statues" is complex and that Yeats is "attempting to account for modern Ireland and at the same time to reconcile differences between Eastern and Western philosophy (278)."

Henn's short comment on "The Statues" is noteworthy:

'The Statues' picks up one of the threads of *A Vision*, which recurs again in 'Under Ben Bulben'. It is the old argument (repeated in *On the Boiler*) for the traditional sculpture, Greek deriving from Egyptian and its 'measurement'; and Alexander's conquest of the East by that achievement. (I believe that this apparent obsession with measurement is more profound than any mere numerology, and that it derives from Blake's engraving 'The Ancient of Days' that hung at Woburn Buildings, in which God is measuring the world with compasses of lightening thrust down through the clouds. Compare 'Measurement began our might.' (325-26)

And finally Albright's Notes focuses on idols:

This poem is a meditation on idols, on God's co-evolution with man as reflected in divine image. As such it is a sequel to 'The Indian [upon] God', in which the moorfowl sees God as a moorfowl, the lotus sees God as a lotus, and so forth: every civilization creates an image of God suitable for its needs and aspirations. Here mankind is not simply the clay moulded by God's hand, as *A Vision* and such poems as 'Leda and the Swan' may seem to suggest; here God is Himself plastic, malleable to human desire.

Pater invited this sort of analysis in his 'Winckelmann': 'Religions . . . are modified by whatever modifies [man's] life. They brighten under a bright sky . . . they grow intense and shrill in the clefts of human life, where the spirit is narrow and confined, and the stars are visible at noonday' (*The Renaissance* [1893], ed. Hill, pp. 159-60). But a more immediate source for this poem was Yeats's study of Indian philosophy; as Yeats remarked in 'An Indian Monk', 'Nor can a single image, that of Christ, Krishna, or Buddha, represent God to the exclusion of other images' (*EI* 433).

"The Statues" is indeed really complex, and despite critics's numerous attempts to explicate it, it is still far from fully understandable. I suggest we begin with Ellmann's, Henn's, and Albright's generalizations about this poem or his last poetry instead of the explications of "The Statues" because the more we read the explications of the poem by critics, the more complex the poem becomes. What matters, when we read a poem by Yeats, is a single image, a single metaphor, a poetic quality of lines, the tension between stanzas, the beautiful, sublime, sad, joyful, hilarious, mild, tempestuous, feelings. A thesis is of course important in a poem, but it is neither straightforwardly direct nor obviously visible; what is more important is, what makes it poetic, whether it is architectonics of form or that of content.²⁾

"The Statues" resulted, as Ellmann says, from the fact that "Yeats foresaw a dominantly Asiatic era to come with loathing [and that] in Asia triumphant the vagueness and generalization which he had always hated would take on inter-continental proportions (187)." In the meantime, Unterecker thinks that Yeats is "attempting to account for modern Ireland and at the same time to reconcile differences between Eastern and Western philosophy (278)." And the third critic, Henn, (as well as F. A. C. Wilson,³⁾ discovers a key idea that underlies the poem, the basic foundation of the Western civilization, which is measurement, in "The Statues." And the fourth critic, Albright focuses on the different conceptions of God in different

species, including men. That "The Statues" has not spoken to each critic in direct, simple language fascinates me.

III. Architectonics of Form and Content

The first prose draft is just a rough sketch a master work is to be based on. Only the final version of a poem is to be the object of our study. And I would like to concentrate on the finished poem, "The Statues." I would pick it up where F. A. C. Wilson and Helen Vendler left it, seemingly not being satisfied. Even Ellmann seemed to see Yeats's last poetry's form as "nonchalant" as mentioned above. Yeats began using his favorite form, *ottava rima*, in "Sailing to Byzantium" in *The Tower* and kept creating great poems, "Sailing to Byzantium," "Among School Children," "Meditations in Time of Civil War" (parts I and IV), "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" (part I), "The Choice," "Coole Park, 1929," "Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931," "Vacillation" (parts II and III), "A Woman Young and Old" (part VIII), "Parnell's Funeral" (part I), "The Gyres," "The Municipal Gallery Revisited," "The Circus Animals' Desertion," and "The Statues."⁴

"The Statues" is the last poem in this form, whose form and content are of great importance, which is seen, by Wilson, as the worst poem, along with "The Municipal Gallery Revisited," in terms of *ottava rima*. But is it the worst poem? No, it is not: first and foremost, it is the last poem Yeats did in this form; it is not likely that it is the worst poem, as he has already written a lot of great poems in this form; and it was more unlikely that he has made so many unintentional mistakes in a single poem. Vendler, without making negative comments on this poem, observes the differences between this last poem and others in *ottava rima*.

I agree with Wilson that "'The Statues' is now characterised by

rhythmical crudities” but neither because “Yeats’s self-delight in his form [*ottava rima*] had diminished by a process of habituation nor because his Steinach operation . . . could not bring back his first refinement of ear (174).” Similarly, I agree with Vendler, who has the keenest ear of ears among scholars, that “all the stanzas of the poem [‘The Statues’] are similarly asymmetrical in the irregular way in which they articulate their sentences. . . . [and that] [b]y making agitation [the irregular use of *ottava rima*]—rather than repose or steadiness—the characteristic mark of the *ottava rima* of ‘The Statues,’ Yeats turns the form on its head (271)”; I think there is some important reason for this.

My argument is that once an artist has mastered a skill, he tends to *deconstruct* it to begin anew. It seems to me that “The Statues” is the case. “The Statues” has a shell of his polished, personalized, *ottava rima*, which is *intentionally asymmetrical* form, which Vendler aptly calls “the form on its head.” The poem’s content, I say, makes the poem’s form stand on its head.

“The Statues” comprises four eight-line stanzas, with “the asymmetrical 6 + 2 formal shell of the *ottava rima*,”⁵⁾ with stanzas one to four rhymed roughly ababacdd, ababaccc, abababcc, abababcc.

Stanzas 1, 3, and 4 are of three different statues: Greek, Indian, and Irish statues. Stanza 2 certainly goes back to the Egyptian men “with a mallet and a chisel” who had “modelled these calculations that look but casual flesh” before the Greek sculptors.

Stanza 1 opens up a story in the middle, dramatically: the Greek boys and girls kiss Phidias’s statue plummet-measured and fashioned pursuant to Pythagoras’s numbers. People stare, empty faced, at the face of the statue, yet it lacks character; it needs passion and character. The first stanza poses a problem: why does the poem (the stanza) begin with a question, which is not very clear?: “Pythagoras planned it. Why did the people stare?” This can be

recast thus: "why did the people stare on it is that Pythagoras planned it." By reversing the cause and effect of a thing makes the statement highly dramatic. But it seems to have caused difficulty in the readers' understanding. One critic says, "The first stanza creates no great difficulties once one has decided what the 'it' is that Pythagoras had planned. Obviously one reading of that 'it' is the notion of number that makes possible the 'plummet-measured' faces of Greek sculpture (Unterecker 279)." Can one stare at "the notion of number"? probably, the face of the sculpture people stare on. Line two begins with a phrase, "His numbers," meaning that the "it" in line one is not "the notion of number" but the face made pursuant to the numbers.

Besides what it means, stanza 1 is a very Yeatsian verse: highly dramatic, philosophical, passionate, and with a clear, impressive image of young boys and girls at moonlit midnight who "pressed/ Live lips upon a plummet-measured face." It is in *ottava rima*, roughly fit for the purpose of expressing a strong image-picture on the readers' mind. Structurally and in content, it is "symmetrical," though it may look asymmetrical in terms of rhyming; there are three separate thought groupings: Pythagoras with the numbers, people, and character, in relation to an art work, a statue:

Pythagoras planned it. Why did the people stare?
His numbers, though they moved or seemed to move
In marble or in bronze, lacked character.

(Albright 384, henceforward only pages numbers cited)

As Ellmann says, "Yeats finds the genesis of Europe in the numbers of Pythagoras" (188) and then goes further back to the foundation of Egyptian civilization, measurement. The speaker's opinion is that the numbers are not enough, what the statue needs is character. But the poet suggests a corrective: passion that boys and girls have, who know that "passion [can] bring

character enough.” Thus, a symbolic act of unity of being in art is realized in the last two lines:

And [the boys and girls] pressed at midnight in some public place
Live lips upon a plummet-measured face. (382)

As in the first stanza, stanza 2’s line one leaves the readers in the dark: “No; greater than Pythagoras.” It is further emphasis on the first stanza’s statement: why the people stared at it is that Pythagoras [had] planned it [the face]. Who is “greater than Pythagoras then”? logically the artists, who modelled the statues. This stanza is also expressive of the poet’s view of art and its history: art is to “look but casual flesh”; art is to be concrete, not general and vague (“[a]ll Asiatic vague immensities”); Phidias’s “plummet-measured” art/ “Gave women dreams and dreams their looking- glass.” This stanza represents the poet’s defense of the Western art, against the onrush of the Eastern, in his time. This is also characteristic of Yeatsian verse: a long range of art history compressed impressively into a eight-line stanza, ending with a brilliant couplet:

Europe put off that foam when Phidias
Gave women dreams and dreams their looking-glass. (384)

Stanza 3 is continuous in form: each begins with a key image: Pythagoras planning it; the men with a mallet and a chisel; one image with [e]mpty eyeballs; and in the next and final stanza, the imagination of Cuchulain stalking with what Ireland is in need of. Despite the concrete image, the reader is always left in the dark, until the last couple, creating uncertainty, which helps gather a dramatic climax. Stanza 3’s line one is fascinating: it is a dual image, like a defocused photo. In fact, it is an image of the statue by

Phidias, and of a Buddha in meditation. It is interesting that the term *statue* has never been used in the poem, except in the title!: in stanza 1, "a plummet-measured" face; in stanza 2 "these calculations"; in stanza 3 "one image"; in stanza 4 "Cuchulain." And finally in stanza 3, the poet defocuses the image of the statue, to make it dual. One reading is: "[o]ne image crossed the many-headed" means that the statue Phidias had sculpted crossed the sea (many-headed foam) to head for India. Another reading may well ask us to see the image of a prince which many people (the many-headed or many people) come to recall. To me, this stanza is the strongest image, which can stand comfortable, in balance with what the two preceding stanzas intend to urge. Maybe, Yeats is implying that the onrush of the East is inevitably making inroads into the Western civilization, no matter how he is against the march of history. Therefore, the asymmetrical formal imbalance of 2 (stanzas) + 1 (stanza) is supremely symmetrical in content. My reading is supported by the image, "No Hamlet thin from eating flies": Hamlet is representative of the West, the rise of the Western poetics, but the poet declares, "No Hamlet . . ." [but] "a fat/ Dreamer of the Middle Ages." Further, the poet declares, "Empty eyeballs knew/ That knowledge increases unreality, that/ Mirror on mirror mirrored is all the show." Remember, the first stanza uses the image of people staring on the face, which must be empty-faced? The meaning of being empty is not "casual" or "calculations" that is the basis of the Western aesthetics. But here in the East it is key to unreality, which means that it is more than surface reality, as the couplet definitely demonstrates:

When gong and conch declare the hour to bless
Grimalkin crawls to Buddha's emptiness. (384)

As illustrated above, this stanza is the conclusive stanza that offsets the

first two stanzas, and it has to be what Yeats has really intended to argue. This argument is further strengthened by the final, fourth stanza. It begins with Pearse:

When Pearse summoned Cuchulain to his side,
What stalked through the Post Office? (384)

This image is of the statue of Cuchulain erected at the rebuilt Post Office. But the question, “[w]hat stalked through the Post Office?” forces us to correlate it with Grimalkin, which is a cat a witch summons in *Macbeth*, and which in this poem “crawls to Buddha’s emptiness.” As Albright suggests, Grimalkin “represent[s] the anxious, famished, intellectual West crawling to the full but hollow East” (826). But to me, the hollow East is not that hollow, and [e]mpty eyeballs are not empty but represent readiness for new enlightenment. The poet keeps asking, what intellect, calculation, number, measurement, replied? The answer could be: No; [w]e Irish, “greater than all these.” Yeats defines the current predicament the Irish are situated in:

We Irish, born into that ancient sect
But thrown upon this filthy modern tide
And by its formless spawning fury wrecked, (384-85)

And finally the last couplet of this poem puts what his disturbed mind has meditated into his current idea of art:

[We Irish, . . .
Climb to our proper dark, that we may trace
The lineaments of a plummet-measured face. (384-85)

Despite this concluding couplet, there is a strong impression that Yeats is

seeing Grimalkin, a symbol of the West, irresistibly "[crawl] to Buddha's emptiness." History marches on, regardless of human wishes, and of Yeats's.

In closing, "The Statue" is one of the best poems in *ottava rima*, though the rhyme schemes are rather uneven, at a glance. The overall structure of form and content of the poem is mastery and represents one of Yeats's best performances. Still, critics have diverse readings of the poem, which fascinates me.

Notes

- 1) See Jeffares, p. 412. According to his commentary, Curtis Bradford suggests it was written between April and June 1938; Daniel Albright also seems to agree with Bradford (385).
- 2) See my essay, "The Architectonics of Form and Content in W. B. Yeats's "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen." It is a highly refined work of art in both form and content; "The Statues" is another example, which can be read in the same way.
- 3) See F. A. C. Wilson, "The Statues," *Yeats: Last Poems: A Casebook*. pp. 166-81. London: Macmillan, 1968. This essay is in response to Vivienne Koch, *W. B. Yeats: The Tragic Phase* (1951) pp. 59-75. Before Wilson, Henn had already pointed out the Egyptian measurement, and Wilson further characterized the features of Egyptian statues.
- 4) See Vendler, Chapter X *The Renaissance Aura: Ottava Rima Poems*, pp. 262-90. *Our Secret Discipline: Yeats and Lyric Form*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007.
- 5) See Vendler, p. 263.

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Manuscript peer-review process:

receipt acknowledged: May 11, 2012
revision received: Jul. 15, 2012
publication approved: Aug. 10. 2012

Edited by: Beau La Rhee