

Yeats, Stoker, and “English” Modernity:

Reading *Dracula* as a Response to the Irish Revival and the Threat of “Irrational” Violence

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Listen to them – the children of the night. What music they make!

- Count Dracula, from Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*

With Standish O’Grady’s *A History of Ireland: The Heroic Period* (1878) the Irish revival, a project devoted to defining Irish national identity, was unofficially inaugurated. The revival looked to Ireland’s pagan past to locate a mythology that could serve as a cultural basis for Irish political independence. Although many other revivalists prepared his way, W. B. Yeats’s early works arguably stand as the most creative and distinctive artifacts of this variously encoded project, which, at least in its Yeatsian version, defies easy categorization in terms of political, class, or ethnic interest. Opposing his vision to modernity, which he understood to be damnably “English,” Yeats campaigned for an enchanted conception of nature and a corresponding form of “irrational” consciousness, what I refer to as “Celtic metaphysics.” This vision asserted itself against rational, materialist England and, in its most violent manifestations, called for young Irishmen to sacrifice themselves in its name. Considering the cultural resonance of the Irish revival and its attention to the occult, the primitive, and the spilling of blood, it is surprising that Irish author Bram Stoker’s immensely popular late-gothic novel *Dracula* (1897) has not been analyzed in terms of its negotiation of revivalism. In fact, despite the occasional mention of Yeats or revivalist anthropology, critics have largely been content to discuss Stoker, even when they are discussing his complex relationship to his own Irishness, without much reference to the movement that marked the Irish literary scene throughout his career.¹ Reading Stoker’s *Dracula* through Yeats’s early work—from the quasi-anthropological collection *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* (1888), to the poems of *Crossways* (1889), to the early nationalist play *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902)—shows the novel to be a complex response to the politics and metaphysics of the revival, a response that ultimately mediates against the revival’s perceived potential to foster irrationality and violence, and instead cautiously embraces the “English modernity” vilified by the young Yeats.

Yeats’s “Celtic Metaphysics”

Yeats’s essay “The Celtic Element in Literature” (first published in 1898) indirectly articulates what Charles Ferral calls the “family romance” scheme underlying Yeats’s and other revivalists’ rejection of England, a scheme dictating that “love for Mother Ireland [is] inseparable from ... hatred for paternal England” (22). The essay accepts Ernest Renan’s and

Matthew Arnold's respective accounts of the Celtic people as a creative, melancholic, primitive, and poetic—from a late-Victorian perspective, essentially feminine—people, but questions the extent to which these are truly *racial* characteristics, suggesting instead that they are the traits of all people captivated by the “ancient worship of Nature and that troubled ecstasy before her, that certainty of all beautiful places being haunted” (176), people who “had not our [modern] thoughts of weight and measure” (178). The colonial English, in turn, are accepted in their self-identified paternal role, but rejected inasmuch as the “feminized” Celt and Mother Ireland are championed as the locus of an ancient yet, in the modern world, potentially revolutionary form of spirituality. This reversal recapitulates Yeats's youthful rejection of his father's rational and positivist Victorian worldview, which he reports to have grown to “despise with a monkish hate” (quoted in Ferral 24) by young adulthood.

The revival, according to Yeats, will effect a great reversal and open up the possibility of an authentically Celtic conception of nature and consciousness, the inauguration of which is a project entrusted to the arts:

“The Celtic movement,” as I understand it, is principally the opening of a fountain, and none can measure of how great importance it may be to the coming times, for every new fountain of legends is a new intoxication for the imagination of the world. (“Celtic Element” 186-187)

Imagination here does not simply connote fantasy, but is mobilized by Yeats as a tool for forging a new metaphysics which finds its objective correlative in reimagined Celtic folklore. Essential to this project is the motif of an underlying numinous “Celtic” nature inimical to the English institutions and abstractions occluding its originary power. For Yeats, this native substratum still animates the land and awaits recovery; with characteristic elusiveness he assures us that, “if one goes far enough into the woods, one will find there all that one is seeking” (179). In spite of his rejection of racial essentialism, in his introduction to *Fairy and Folk Tales* Yeats contends that the “The Celt is a visionary without scratching” (2)—he is uniquely capable of feeling, in his blood, the call emanating from Ireland's captive soil. Thus, while Arnold saw the Celtic dreamer as the figure furthest removed from politics, Yeats endeavored to reimagine the Celt's dream as a dormant form of cultural and political power with both reactionary and revolutionary features.

This dream is defined against modernity and England, which, as Michael Valdez Moses describes, are indistinguishable for Yeats:

Yeats called for a simultaneous repudiation of modernity (which he understood to be characterized by rationalism, materialism, commercialism, science, mechanical philosophy, liberalism, secularism, and the rise of the middle class), and a rejection of British imperial rule (which was the engine by which modernity had reached Ireland). (565)

Although the revival certainly did position itself against liberal democracy and capitalism, it is science, rationalism, mechanical philosophy, and materialism that are identified with the metaphysical evils of the positivist nineteenth-century for Yeats. The “filthy modern tide”² of Locke and Newton is seen to dominate Ireland in a kind of metaphysical colonialism (or rape, to extend the oedipal reading) that compliments English economic exploitation and military coercion. However, in spite of the complimentary positioning of these various faces of domination, the metaphysical stands out as the most significant for the early Yeats inasmuch as he saw the primitive, folkloric apprehension of reality as the only viable avenue for Irish “emancipation”—for Yeats, an independent Ireland cast in a scientific, materialistic mould would still be a colonized Ireland in the most important respects. Like King Fergus in “Fergus and the Druid,” Yeats rejected political action in favour of a “dreaming wisdom” (23) that exceeds the political even as it seems insubstantial or unreal by comparison. Thus when Yeats associated himself with the revolutionaries in “To Ireland in the Coming Times” (1889) he was not merely casting himself in the ancillary role of “bard laureate” of the nationalist movement, but was casting himself in the *indispensable* role of cultural alchemist, the figure who could—by way of an ideological process that defies any clear distinction between the literal and the figurative—transform modern Ireland back into “A Druid land” (32).³

This druid land is brought to life in Yeats’s early poetry, which draws heavily on Irish folklore to invoke a world that is romantic and pastoral but not devoid of an element of horror that resonates with Stoker’s fiction. In Yeats’s poetry, however, the frightening or estranging aspect of Celtic mythology is its power—it is synonymous with its radical departure from the dull familiarity of scientific materialism and disenchanting Newtonian nature. Poems like “Who goes with Fergus?,” “The Stolen Child,” and “The Hosting of the Sidhe” represent the call emanating from “the deep heart’s core” (“Innisfree” 12) as one that delivers the answerer to a radically different world. Although this world can be dark and fearsome in its own right, it is celebrated as the means to a new conception of nature or being that accords with the general celebration of the Celtic character—the revivalist idealization of “the primitive Irish not because of their natural conformity to the standards of contemporary civilization but because of their natural defiance of them” (Mattar 18). What is feral and strange in a figure like King Goll, for example, who rejects mundane political power in favour of pre-civilized life in the wilderness (“Madness” 26-27), is also what makes him a commanding rejection of modernity and a signifier of alternate possibilities. Even the fearsome Sidhe, who threaten humans with dissolution and death, promise rebirth inasmuch as they offer deliverance from the quotidian and flight into the numinous, wild, and uncharted. Thus, the mad, the frightening, the inexplicable are all weighed against the pernicious banality of English modernity; as in William Blake’s “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell,” the dreadfulness of these mythic figures and daemons is partly “owing to [the beholder’s] metaphysics” (39).

Although most of Yeats's early work draws a distinction between dreaming wisdom and worldly action, the motif of transformation is dramatized as a violent political intervention in the nationalist play *Cathleen ni Houlihan*. In terms supplied by Yeats's later prophetic work *A Vision* (1925), the play concerns a young man's metamorphosis from primary (material, objective, solar) consciousness to antithetical (ethereal, subjective, lunar) consciousness⁴ after hearing the call of a poor old woman who is later revealed to be Cathleen ni Houlihan, the mythic personification of Mother Ireland and her "beautiful green fields." Cathleen's call delivers the young man, Michael Gillane, to an antithetical state of consciousness that causes the material and commercial negotiation of his upcoming marriage to appear insubstantial and irrelevant compared to the defence of his motherland. After hearing the call, Michael takes on "the look of a man that has got the touch" (27) and, captivated by the vision of a free Ireland, cannot recall anything about his own life. As Yeats explains in his note to "The Host of the Air" (1899), "the touch" refers to the "magical sleep" (213) brought on by the call of the Sidhe—here the dark aspect of Celticism is directly associated with its violent revolutionary power. Michael's family tries to stop him from joining the uprising, but, as his father realizes, he is lost in another world: "It's no use. He doesn't hear a word we're saying" (27). Michael is the play's hero, the one capable of hearing Cathleen's call and unselfishly offering his blood for her regeneration (28); the play, which Yeats would later regret, is thus a celebration of intoxicated zeal and martyrdom over domestic concord (primitive tragedy over bourgeois comedy, as Valdez Moses points out) (565). *Cathleen ni Houlihan* is significant because it mobilizes Yeats's revivalist theme of an alternate, Celtic metaphysics for the most violent nationalistic purposes and even anticipates the uncompromising militancy of the Sein Féin (which would be officially formed a few years later in 1905).

Stoker's "Inverse Gothic"

Stoker negotiated the same cultural landscape as Yeats, but charted a much different path. Like Yeats, Stoker was part of the Anglo-Irish elite and lived most of his life in London. While critics have accepted Yeats's early revivalism and nationalism as genuine—though extremely problematic for its mystification of the Anglo-Irish/Catholic-Irish class divide—they have almost universally cast Stoker as a staunch Anglo-supremacist interested in the suppression of the Catholic underclass. As Joseph Valente points out in his compelling study *Dracula's Crypt* (2002), Stoker criticism has been dominated by the belief that the author of *Dracula* was a member of "the Anglo-Protestant garrison, whose members were vainly striving to secure borders of their collective identity against the nightmare of political violence [militant Irish nationalism] ... the terror of racial absorption, and 'the spectre of bad blood and degeneration'" (9). However, Stoker was in fact an "interethnic Anglo-Celt" (4), a supporter of home rule, and even a strong supporter of Yeats's Irish Literary Society. Stoker was certainly a more complex figure than much criticism has given him credit for; far from an unambiguous

Anglophile, he struggled with the same oedipal drama that obsessed Yeats. Stoker's Irish-Catholic mother initiated her son into the enchanted world of Celtic folklore at a young age, while his Anglo-Irish father also espoused the rational, scientific, materialistic world of the late-Victorian man (18)—a perfect microcosm of the cultural predicament seized upon by Yeats and other revivalists.

Misconceptions about Stoker's heritage and allegiances have led to the belief that, read as an Irish novel, *Dracula* is primarily about the author's fear of the Catholic majority. This reading suggests that Dracula is a rapacious Celtic primitive whose debased yet fertile racial stock threatens all Anglo-Saxons, Anglo-Irish and English alike. This reading, however, seems unlikely considering Stoker's lineage; Dracula is indeed identified with Irishness, but only the vision of Irishness promoted by Yeats and the revivalists. This vision is contested in *Dracula* inasmuch as the novel accepts the metaphysics of English modernity while simultaneously acknowledging Yeats's Celtic metaphysics as a real cultural presence and a real ideological threat.

Dracula, a novel born out of Stoker's engagement with the occult revival (Castle 59), turns the gothic inwards upon itself: it makes use of a genre best known for exposing the underside of modernity—"mystery, excess, and frequently horror rather than rational inquiry and careful discipline" (Senf 7)—as a battlefield for the subjugation of that same uncanny reflection.⁵ As Christopher Herbert points out, the "fundamental doctrine" (106) of *Dracula* is reification: the gothic genre allows Stoker to portray various ideological threats as *real* presences, just as Yeats uses symbols from Celtic antiquity to denote an antithetical ontology. This reification goes beyond Herbert's discussion of religion and femininity; another major trend in *Dracula* is the transformation of nature itself—a primordial nature outside the grasp of Dr. Seward's Victorian science—into various occult objective correlatives. Throughout the novel Dracula appears as a bat (Stoker 81) and a mist (78), and is associated with teeming hoards of rats (216); he also controls nature as if he were a pagan god of old: "he can [...] direct the elements; the storm, the fog, the thunder; he can command all the meaner things; the rat, the owl, and the bat – the moth, the fox, and the wolf" (203). Jonathan Harker is also quick to point out that Transylvania, which actually means "beyond the forest" (Valente 51),⁶ is "one of the wildest and least known portions of the Europe," a place that is literally not on the map (1). Thus Transylvania is simultaneously Ireland and Celtic nature, the native land of Dracula on both registers. This trend in the novel suggests that Dracula is a reification of the natural substratum I've identified with Celtic metaphysics; as such he is not straightforwardly "supernatural," rather he is "antithetical" to use the Yeatsian lexicon. However, unlike Yeats's fairies and daemons, Dracula and his minions are purely pernicious; the vampire is seen in light of the hegemonic Christian interpretation of the occult or pagan as unambiguously evil.⁷

The "inverse gothic" allows Stoker to represent Celtic metaphysics as a reality (as Dracula) while representing them in a fashion that is already a call for their suppression. Like

the Sidhe who whisper “Come away, O human child” (Yeats, “Stolen” 8), Dracula lures women and children out into the night, but the deliverance from the quotidian he offers damns their souls. Before he first drinks blood from Lucy Westerna, for example, Dracula calls to her in the form of a diffuse mist (Stoker 78) and compels his victim to walk out into the night where she is transformed into a vampire herself. This narrative of seduction resonates with the Yeatsian Cathleen, who rejuvenates herself through the “consumption” of young Irish blood, while the hypnotic automatism of the undead Lucy has resonance with the trancelike, antithetical state that captivates Michael Gillane and leads to his violent martyrdom. Dracula’s minion Renfield, who used to be a civilized gentleman, is likewise seduced to mania, blood worship (121), and zeal for the coming of a new era (88-89), a degenerative transformation that makes him appear “more like a wild beast than a man” (88). Dracula’s nostalgia for more primitive and warlike times—“Blood is too precious a thing in these days of dishonourable peace; and the glories of the great races are as a tale told” (25) he explains to Jonathan—also calls to mind Yeats’s early association of “ancient Ireland” with nationalist violence, earning the Count his evocative name, *droch fholá*, which as many critics have noted means “bad blood” in Gaelic. His crumbling medieval castle further suggests that he is a barbarous anachronism.⁸ This negative representation of the occult and the primitive derives from Stoker’s generally positive attitude towards modernity’s legacy of rationalism, science, and technology; the call of Old Eire is evil precisely because it seduces the Irish people to a mentality that Stoker associates with regression into irrational and violent states of consciousness.

Although *Dracula* acknowledges (reifies) the occult, it is ultimately about the triumph of science and reason over its irrational seductions; in the end, the novel “affirms the status quo of scientific reasoning and aligns it firmly with the conventional bases of cultural power at the time” (Jann 273). The character Van Helsing, a man who is at once an occultist and a renowned physician, allows Stoker to chart this trajectory. Van Helsing’s hectoring of Jonathan—a man most comfortable with modern accessories such as his “kodak” (Stoker 19), map, and train schedule—might seem to be a rejection of science and modernity, but it actually establishes a more nuanced and self-aware understanding of their hegemony:

You are a clever man, friend John; you reason well, and your wit is bold; but you are too prejudiced. You do not let your eyes see nor your ears hear, and that which is outside your daily life is not of account to you. Do you not think that there are things which you cannot understand, and yet which are; that some people see things that others cannot? But there are things old and new which must not be contemplate by men’s eyes, because they know – or think they know – some things which other men have told them. Ah, it is the fault of our science that is wants to explain all; and if it explain not, then it says there is nothing to explain. But yet we see around us every day the growth of

new beliefs, which think themselves new; and which are yet but the old, which pretend to be young [sic]. (163)

Van Helsing acknowledges that there is something beyond science and rationalism—“A year ago which of us would have received such a possibility, in the midst of our scientific, skeptical, matter-of-fact nineteenth century?” (205) he asks—but this acknowledgement enables him to vanquish their antithetical emanations more effectively. In his address to “the crew of light,” he assures his fellows that “we too are not without strength. We have on our side the power of combination – a power denied to the vampire kind. We have the [re]sources of science” (204). Indeed, Dracula is ultimately defeated through method, deduction, facts, and reason; as Rosemary Jann puts it, “the narrative insists that the medium is the message” (283). The band of Victorian, masculinist detectives—which includes Mina with her “masculine” fact-accumulating, analytical brain—manages to restore order to London, to deliver it from “the Pagan world of old” (Stoker 115) in the name of modernity.

Van Helsing’s speech engages with the ideology of the revival by acknowledging the mystical and the irrational as genuine threats; Celtic ontology, for Van Helsing, is a spectral underside of material reality that necessitates its own suppression. He is consciously aware of the supernatural nature that so confounds Dr. Seward and understands that it holds *real* power over an irrational Other—“some people” who “see things that others cannot.” He blames reductive science for convincing Victorian man of his superiority and security to the extent that he cannot even fathom the potential power of the occult, despite the fact that “we see around us every day the growth of new beliefs.” In context, such primitive beliefs, simultaneously new and ancient, are plainly suggestive of the Celtic revival. Thus Van Helsing’s speech reads more like a warning against revivalism than a condemnation of English modernity—in effect, he is cautioning Jonathan to know his enemy. Modern man must be vigilant, for, as the ideological success of the revival makes clear, “the old centuries had, and have, powers of their own which mere ‘modernity’ cannot kill” (30). Worse still, Dracula’s “child mind” (259) is capable of maturation and adaptation to new conditions: the infantilized Celt might mature into something far more dangerous. It is up to a figure like Van Helsing, a man of both worlds as it were, to insure that this power is contained. In this sense, Van Helsing is a stand-in for Stoker himself—he is a character who perfectly embodies the logic of the “inverse gothic.”

This reading of Dracula as a negotiation of two Irelands—revivalist Celtic Ireland and “English modern” Ireland—accords with Stoker’s politics, which are unorthodox in their nationalism to say the least. In spite of Stoker’s strong belief in the future of the Celtic race,⁹ Valente convincingly argues that his support of an independent Ireland was always understood in light of what he called “the voice of England” (40), the need for peaceful concord amongst the colonies:

[For Stoker,] Home Rule, by institutionalizing political subdivision consistent with the inherently multicultural nature of the United Kingdom, might serve

as an antidote to the *violently exclusionary identity politics undergirding British imperialism and Irish nationalism alike* (41).

In a complex move that seems to validate Yeats's later fears about the Irish Free State, Stoker advocates Home Rule as a means of diffusing the revivalists' vision of Celtic identity, and the violence it has the potential to unleash, in favour of a homogenous vision of the United Kingdom that would acknowledge difference but solidify a broader identity. For Yeats, this broader identity reduces Irish nationalism to an empty façade since it pretends to champion English modernity and Ireland alike, which is an incoherent gesture for Yeats. However, Van Helsing's Roman Catholicism seems to suggest that this gesture is advanced as a fruitful compromise: while he rejects Celtic enchantment and the call of Cathleen in favour of science and modernity, Van Helsing reserves his irrational investment for the Catholic crucifix, an "occult" object with residual primitive resonance of its own that is both Other to Anglo-Protestant hegemony and comfortably the same. As Jann points out, Roman Catholicism, like the occult, saw renewed popularity as Victorian science grew more reductive and unsatisfying, but offered an alternative (i.e. non-Celtic) avenue for the critique of science and rationality that did not aspire to cultural revolution (274) and was thus compatible with a much more temperate reformation of wider English/modern cultural and philosophical institutions. The central symbol of the crucifix, which contains and displaces the Celtic call, is thus indicative of a reformist tendency in Stoker's novel which contrasts sharply with the early Yeats's totalizing revolutionary impulse. Van Helsing has not become a lifeless mechanism in his attempt to defend the scientific worldview (a slave to reason and reductive materialism, like many of his Victorian forebears) nor has he been seduced to mania or bloodlust: he is, in spite of his manifest Dutch ethnicity, Stoker's perfect Irishman.

Neither/Nor?

While the early, revivalist Yeats rejected English modernity without reservation, arguably without regard for the material needs of the Irish people, Stoker attempted to reconcile "English modernity" with a free Ireland. *Dracula* stands as a testament to this vision; it recognizes the Celtic metaphysics evident in Yeats's work as a real cultural and political force, but does so in order to combat what is seen to be its dangerous, hypnotic allure more effectively and to prevent a collective plunge into irrational violence. However, it remains debatable whether or not Stoker's reformist vision is superior: while it purges some of the reactionary, romantic, and primitivist elements from Irish nationalism, it accomplishes this goal by greatly softening its impact and limiting its scope. Furthermore, if Yeats is taken seriously as a revolutionary poet and playwright of decolonization, a reading Edward Said has advanced, then his rejection of modernity takes on a progressive dimension that repositions Stoker as little more than a liberal reacting predictably against emancipatory violence and its other potential consequence: real epochal change. From this perspective, Stoker's perfect Irishman is

perfectly assimilated and—divested of his militant fangs—perfectly powerless to inaugurate the new era Yeats encoded in his symbolic language. Indeed, considering the reality of the Home Rule act (not really) to come and the subsequent bloody road to independence, Yeats's early willingness to advocate zealous political violence does not seem so "irrational," especially considering that such violence ultimately revealed itself to be entirely separable from Yeats's esoteric Celtic vision (and much to his frustration).¹⁰

In the final analysis, neither Yeats nor Stoker can be held up as paragons of revolution or reform, at least where their respective negotiations of Irishness, modernity, and violence are concerned. While Yeats had a radical and compelling vision, it relied uncompromisingly on the esoteric Celtic metaphysics that gradually forced his quixotic break with almost all mainstream political discussion. While Stoker had a more nuanced and less esoteric vision for Ireland, it arguably failed to offer anything more than mediated cultural assimilation and business as usual. Taken together, Yeats and Stoker offer something of a meditation on the threshold that divides thought from action;¹¹ in the context of the revival and the emergent modern nationalist movement in Ireland, these authors reacted in different ways to the possibility of "crossing over" from aesthetics and ideology to violent activism, a movement which is always "irrational" insofar as it seeks an aggressive break with the limitations of a given conceptual horizon and political order. Looking back on the conflicting attitudes that characterize their respective texts, we discover not a straightforward contrast between real ideological commitment and its mediation, but the maintenance of this threshold itself as the site of a fertile conflict to be imagined across incompatible points of view: the preservation, in thought, of a horizon beyond which thought must become violence to enact itself.

Notes

¹ An important exception is Joseph Valente's excellent study *Dracula's Crypt* (2002), which acknowledges the importance of the revival's occultism to Stoker's development as a horror writer, and even notes the similarity between *Dracula* and Yeats's *Cathleen*. Other studies, such as Carol Senf's *Science and Social Science in Dracula* (2002), pursue the question of science and modernity in Stoker's work without directly relating this question to the largely anti-modern, anti-scientific revival.

² I borrow this phrase from Yeats's late poem "The Statues" (1938).

³ Ironically this stance eventually led to the later Yeats's complete withdrawal from nationalist politics and into the hermetic world of high-modernist, aristocratic salon drama and the cult of Cuchulain.

⁴ Yeats generally identifies the antithetical with the Celtic and the primary with the English. In a later note to "Leda and the Swan" (1928), he announces the coming of a future-primitive Celtic civilization: "[all] our scientific, democratic, fact-accumulating, heterogenous civilization belongs to the outward [primary] gyre and prepares not the continuance of itself but the revelation as in a lightning flash, though in a flash that will not strike only in one place, and will for a time be constantly repeated, of the civilization that must take its place" (quoted in Ferral 35).

⁵ And of course many other Gothic novels create such an inversion.

⁶ Valente also points out this phrase's suggestion of "beyond the pale" a colloquialism for the Celtic lands that lay outside of British rule – the political wilderness as it were.

⁷ Certainly *Dracula* is as seductive and compelling as the Sidhe in many respects, but within the melodramatic structure of the novel he is straightforwardly evil, however much semi-conscious appeal he might hold for the reader (not to mention Stoker himself).

⁸ Given my own reading of *Dracula*, I find it difficult to assimilate the suggestion that Dracula in his castle is a representative of the Anglo-Irish absentee landlord or the bloodsucking international Capitalist.

⁹ Something he was willing to announce publicly in his 1872 *Address to the Historical Society* and held to throughout his life.

¹⁰ As many critics have noted, Yeats's esoteric stance later led to his seemingly quixotic rejection of nationalist politics at the very moment of their apparent triumph—the establishment of the Irish free state in 1920—due to the fact that his Celtic vision had been ignored in favour of the modern metaphysics and middle-class values he associated with England and thus with the demise of "old Eire." Despite this withdrawal, however, the later Yeats continued to believe in the primacy of what I'm terming the metaphysical, although at this point it would be fair to say that his vision of revolution was almost entirely aesthetic. We might identify the romantic early Yeats with aspirations for an Irish ontology and the later, more aesthetic Yeats with a far more self-critical and ironic (i.e. modernist) version of this same project.

¹¹ In *The Century* (2005), Alain Badiou argues that much of modernist poetics is singularly preoccupied with the "threshold" (22) between thought and violent action, marking modernism as a productively dangerous discourse. The contrast between Yeats's early "apolitical" poetic works and *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, for example, captures modernism's tendency to vacillate between esoteric conceptual interventions and (often entirely imagined) "real" political interventions.

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