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PARADIGMS OF PERIPHERAL MODERNITY IN LORCA AND YEATS

In 'Politics', Yeats has a poem in which Spanish politics shrinks to nothing beside the sight of a beautiful young woman:

How can I, that girl standing there,
my attention fix
on Roman or Russian
or on Spanish politics?¹

Despite Yeats's injunction not to worry too much about Spanish politics, I shall, in what follows, be asking Yeats to do just this, to worry not necessarily about the Spanish Civil War, which was the burning issue of the day, but rather something deeper and more structurally significant. For there is a similarity between Ireland and Spain in terms of their sense—in the nineteenth and part of the twentieth century—of living a life which appeared to be peripheral to the Western discourse of modernity.

Given that the Irish writer with whom most connections with Lorca have been asserted—J. M. Synge²—was greatly admired by Yeats,³ it is perhaps not surprising that there should be a number of coincidences between the work of Yeats and Lorca. The first is the troubled relationship that each poet had with urban modernity. In Timothy Webb's words, Yeats 'resisted the influence [. . .] not only of London itself, but of the modern city and the modern world' (p. xxxviii).⁴ This despite living in London for many years (Yeats settled in Ireland in 1922 when he became a senator). As Emer Nolan points out:

The modern, in colonial conditions, is associated with 'foreignness', domination and violence; it is in no sense naturalized in the course of a long process of economic and social development. It is precisely in such a situation that the culturally 'old' appears most intensely valuable, and becomes the object of political contestation.⁵

This fact influenced Yeats's relationship with modernism, which was clearly a fraught one. Patricia Coughlan and Alex Davis's book *Modernism and Ireland* does not have a single essay on Yeats, since his 'aesthetic premises [. . .] differ consistently' from those of the Modernists.⁶ A similar picture of estrangement

¹ W. B. Yeats, *Selected Poems*, ed. by Timothy Webb (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000), p. 224; referred to below as *Selected Poems*.

² See in particular Jean L. Smoot, *A Comparison of Plays by John Millington Synge and Federico García Lorca: The Poets and Time* (Madrid: Porrúa Turanzas, 1978); Francisco E. Feito, 'Synge y Lorca: De *Riders to the Sea* a *Bodas de sangre*', *García Lorca Review*, 9 (1981), 144–52; and John D. Ajala, 'Similarities between J. M. Synge's *Riders to the Sea* and F. G. Lorca's *Blood Wedding*', *College Language Association Journal*, 28 (1985), 314–25.

³ 'J. M. Synge and the Ireland of his Time', in *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1961), pp. 311–42.

⁴ As Yeats wrote in 1901: 'Surely a bitter hatred of London is becoming a mark of those that love the arts' ('At Stratford-upon-Avon', in *Essays and Introductions*, pp. 96–110 (p. 98)).

⁵ 'Modernism and the Irish Revival', in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 157–72 (pp. 159–60).

⁶ Patricia Coughlan and Alex Davis, 'Introduction', in *Modernism and Ireland: The Poets of the 1930s* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1995), pp. 1–23 (p. 18). Furthermore: 'Yeats's fidelity to traditional metrical and stanzaic forms, his belief that "ancient salt is best packing", is clearly at odds with the neo-modernists' various experiments with vers libre, devices of fragmentation and, in some cases, surrealist techniques' (p. 19).

from the modern emerges when studying Lorca and his work. When in the autumn of 1929 Lorca travelled from Granada to New York, that paradigmatic city of modernity, he got lost on a number of occasions; he could not read the map; he boarded a train travelling in the wrong direction; and having taken a taxi, he then panicked that he was being kidnapped.⁷ What is more, he found it impossible to learn English, and finally he wrote a work, *Poeta en Nueva York*, published after many mishaps in 1940—the manuscript of which has only recently seen the light of day in an auction at Christie's in 2005—which presents New York as an urban nightmare.⁸ Another similarity—surely there is a connection between them—was that both Yeats and Lorca were very much absorbed by the orature of their respective countries.⁹ Lorca was able to use oral rhythms in his poetry, and was sensitive to folk songs from an early age. Martínez Nadal, for example, has claimed that 'until three years of age he could not speak, but a year after his birth he was following the rhythm of song, and when two years old was already humming popular airs'.¹⁰

Both poets were also interested in folklore and myth, particularly where these related to a native cultural inheritance. In Yeats this interest is evident in his fascination with the *Wanderings of Oisín* and with other figures of Irish folklore (of which more below). Lorca, for his part, delved into the Spanish ballad, which he recast skilfully, particularly in early works such as *Poema del cante jondo* (1921) and *Romancero gitano* (1928).¹¹ Lorca must, of course, be credited with more than simply tapping the vague imaginings of an illiterate *Volkkultur*, for he was involved in rewriting and thereby transforming popular verse. He was very much a *poeta culto*, rather like other members of the Generation of 1927; in fact, he was quite insulted at one point to discover that he was being referred to as a gypsy poet. Another point in common is that both poets retained sonorous verbal metres, even while there were other forces in English and Spanish poetry which were beginning to break down the dominance of rhyme. Indeed, A. A. Anderson discusses the similarities between Lorca and Yeats in terms of their poor academic progress as well as their sensitivity to speech; he advances the hypothesis that both poets were dyslexic, which is probably an overstatement,¹² but there are certainly some points in his essay worth pondering at greater length.¹³

⁷ Andrew A. Anderson, 'Was García Lorca Dyslexic (like W. B. Yeats)?', *MLR*, 94 (1999), 700–17 (p. 702).

⁸ For more information on the fate of the manuscript of *Poeta en Nueva York* see Stephen M. Hart, 'Poetry on Trial: The Strange Case of Lorca's *Poeta en Nueva York*', *Hispanic Research Journal*, 4 (2003), 271–84.

⁹ 'Yeats was much influenced by the fact that in certain parts of the country, the oral tradition was still identifiably alive' (Webb, in *Selected Poems*, p. xxxvi).

¹⁰ Quoted in Anderson, 'Was García Lorca Dyslexic (like W. B. Yeats)?', p. 702. Francisco García Lorca says of Federico that 'la música precedió en él a la palabra' (quoted in Anderson, p. 702).

¹¹ All references are to García Lorca, *Romancero gitano: Poema del cante jondo*, 4th edn (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1976).

¹² Yeats's official biographer has said: 'Dyslexia has been retrospectively alleged, but it is not borne out by the ease and fluency with which WBY devoured books when he finally learnt to read' (R. F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life*, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997–2003), 1: *The Apprentice Mage 1865–1914*, p. 17).

¹³ Of particular interest is Anderson's discussion of the connections between dyslexia, metathesis, and metaphor ('Was García Lorca Dyslexic (like W. B. Yeats)?', pp. 715–17). Anderson criti-

The similarities between Lorca and Yeats such as I have sketched them here—a sense of the artist at the periphery, a troubled relationship with the urban and modernity, a rootedness in rural culture, a fascination with the oral tradition and in particular the national ballad, even the hint of dyslexia—would be evident in even the most cursory reading of their respective works. The object of this essay, however, is to explore the notion that—perhaps as a result of all of the above—both poets retained a fascination with the supernatural, with ghosts, which was nurtured by their attachment to the land, and also to the notion of *genius loci*, the spirit of a place. I shall be exploring the idea that the ghost functions in their work as an indication of the repressed presence of the subaltern, which, for reasons of race, religion, or ethnicity, ‘lies’ (in both sense of the term) on the wrong side of the law, which I interpret also to encompass the sense of a rational empiricism.¹⁴ The subaltern is understood here in the sense given to the term by Gayatri Spivak in her 1988 essay ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’. Spivak takes her point of departure from a critique of the Foucauldian notion of Western subjectivity, and then concludes that ‘in the context of colonial production [. . .] [the] subaltern has no history and cannot speak’.¹⁵ The ghost appears in Yeats’s as well as Lorca’s work as a result of what Spivak names—or perhaps better renames via Foucault—‘epistemic violence’ (Spivak, p. 25), rupturing the spatio-temporal membrane of what is real both in an ocular and in a political sense. Their appearance is an act of defiance undermining the economy of the visible and the discourse of the real. Another way of expressing this idea is to say that Yeats’s ghosts, like Lorca’s, are postcolonial ghosts.¹⁶

I am of course not the first to address the postcolonial ethos in Yeats’s work—David Lloyd in particular has a fine study on this subject¹⁷—but I want to pursue a slightly different argument from that put forward by other critics, and look in particular at the connections between ‘Irishry’ and the Gaelic, between ghosts and cultural memory. The anger that Yeats expresses in his essay ‘A General Introduction for my Work’ certainly qualifies it as a contender for the prize of postcolonial grief, even in competition with texts by writers such as the African Ngugi wa Thiong’o, the Martinique theoretician Frantz Fanon,

cizes Foster for downplaying Yeats’s dyslexia: ‘Foster’s dismissive attitude is entirely unjustified’ (p. 710).

¹⁴ I advance a similar hypothesis of the cultural value associated with ghosts in my ‘Magical Realism in the Americas: Politicised Ghosts in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *The House of the Spirits*, and *Beloved*’, *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies*, 9 (2003), 115–23.

¹⁵ Gayatri Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 24–31 (p. 28).

¹⁶ It is significant to note in this context that the mystery associated with fairyland in Irish folklore was willed, epitomized by the dictum: ‘Be careful, and do not seek to know too much about us’ (*Fairy and Folk Tales of Ireland*, ed. by W. B. Yeats (New York: Macmillan, 1973), p. xvi. Like the ‘pagan gods of Ireland—the *Tuath-De-Danan*—robbed of worship and offerings, [who] grew smaller and smaller’ (idem. p. 235), the fairies are an example of the subalternized supernatural. For a helpful discussion of subaltern theory in the context of Irish culture, see Colin Graham, ‘Subalternity and Gender: Problems of Postcolonial Irishness’, in *Theorizing Ireland*, ed. by Claire Connolly (London: Palgrave, 2003), pp. 150–59.

¹⁷ *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment* (Dublin: Lilliput, 1993). See in particular the chapter ‘The Poetics of Politics: Yeats and the Founding of the State’, pp. 59–87.

and the Cuban Roberto Fernández Retamar (of whom more later).¹⁸ Speaking of the 'Irishry', Yeats says:

no people, Lecky said at the opening of his *Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, have undergone greater persecution, nor did that persecution altogether cease up to our present day. No people hate as we do in whom that past is always alive, there are moments when hatred poisons my life and I accuse myself of effeminacy because I have not given it adequate expression.¹⁹

Even as he is about to express his anger, however, Yeats is suddenly brought up sharp by the fact that all his 'family names' are 'English', that 'I owe my soul to Shakespeare, to Spenser and to Blake, perhaps to William Morris, and to the English language in which I think, and write' (p. 519). As he continues, using what is at first a rather bizarre image: 'everything I love has come to me through English; my hatred tortures me with love, my love with hate. I am like the Tibetan monk who dreams at his initiation that he is eaten by a wild beast and learns on waking that he himself is eater and eaten' (p. 519). As an embodiment of the dispossessed colonized consciousness Yeats is 'eaten' by English culture and language, but—here is the point of origin of his epistemological and existential distress—in his simultaneous incarnation as a constituent part of English culture he 'eats' himself. It is, of course, an impossible situation.²⁰

In case anyone might think this to be different from the classic 'postcolonial bind', Yeats describes what must have been quite a memorable occasion in which, at a dinner in his honour, he attacked all the guests, the English as well as the Indians:

That there might be no topical speeches I denounced the oppression of the people of India; being a man of letters, not a politician, I told how they had been forced to learn everything, even their own Sanskrit, through the vehicle of English till the first discoverer of wisdom had become bywords for vague facility. I begged the Indian writers present to remember that no man can think or write with music and vigour except in his mother tongue. I turned a friendly audience hostile, yet when I think of that scene I am unrepentant and angry. (p. 520)

It is important to underline that Yeats focuses on language as not just the symptom but indeed the building-block of culture; his ideas are an early example of the postcolonial dilemma such as we see it expressed in a whole consort of writers ranging from Edward Said to Frantz Fanon, from Gayatri Spivak to Ngugi wa Thiong'o. This is especially evident in Yeats's acute consciousness of the language dilemma. As Yeats concludes his passionate essay: 'I could no more

¹⁸ For a good selection of postcolonial theoretical texts, see *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (see Spivak, above): there are essays by Thiong'o and Fanon on pp. 285–90 and 153–57 respectively; see also Peter Childs and Patrick Williams, *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory* (London: Prentice Hall, 1997); Robert C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001); Dennis Walder, *Post-Colonial Literatures in English* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998); Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). For a good discussion of the interplay of postcolonial theory and African and Asian literatures, see Patrick Colm Hogan, *Empire and Poetic Voice* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004).

¹⁹ 'A General Introduction for my Work', in *Essays and Introductions*, pp. 509–26 (p. 519).

²⁰ For further discussion of Yeats's politics, see Malcolm Brown, 'Poetry Defends the Gap: Yeats and Hyde', in his *The Politics of Irish Literature* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1972), pp. 348–70; as well as the major collection of essays *Yeats's Political Identities: Selected Essays*, ed. by Jonathan Allison (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996).

have written in Gaelic than can those Indians write in English; Gaelic is my national language, but it is not my mother tongue' (p. 520). Yeats's postcolonial anger emerges in the interstice between his 'national language' and his 'mother tongue', and he clearly rehearsed a drama which would be enacted on the world stage of postcolonial literatures in the 1960s, when African writers deliberated over whether to write in English or Igbo, when Indian writers wrestled with the dilemma of whether they should write in Urdu or English.²¹ This dilemma has been much studied and this is not the time to rehearse the features of its evolution, but before moving on it is worth observing that Yeats's position has much in common with that of the Cuban intellectual Roberto Fernández Retamar. In his angry essay entitled simply *Calibán* (1971) Retamar sketches out the story of how colonized peoples have been turned into Caliban figures: as in *The Tempest*, they are ugly, deformed, evil cannibals, and yet their only real agency is their ability to curse. As Caliban says in Shakespeare's play:

You taught me language: and my profit on't
Is, I know how to curse: the red plague rid you,
For learning me your language.

(1. 2. 366–68)²²

One is reminded, perhaps, of the *áer*, the lampoon of the early Irish poets, the *filid*—it was reputed to be such an effective curse that it could not only ruin reputations but also lead to the death of its addressee. Retamar takes up this injunction from Caliban's words and champions him as a new symbol of the colonized peoples; in Retamar's hands this curse has a Cold War ring about it, but he chooses Caliban since he is a particularly apt symbol of Cuba's dilemma:

Nuestro símbolo no es pues Ariel, como pensó Rodó, sino Calibán. Esto es algo que vemos con particular nitidez los mestizos que habitamos estas mismas islas donde vivió Calibán: Próspero invadió las islas, mató a nuestros antepasados, esclavizó a Calibán y le enseñó su idioma para poder entenderse con él: ¿Qué otra cosa puede hacer Calibán sino utilizar ese mismo idioma—hoy no tiene otro—para maldecirlo, para desear que caiga sobre él la 'roja plaga'? No conozco otra metáfora más acertada de nuestra situación cultural.²³

Retamar cannot turn his back on Spanish, the language of the conqueror, and go back to Taino, since the Taino language, once spoken on Cuba, has been 'very poorly preserved'.²⁴ This is why Yeats's dilemma is similar to Fernández Retamar's; for him personally, since he had no Gaelic, there was no way back. Was the situation, we find ourselves asking, similar in Lorca's case? Is there a sense in which we can talk about Lorca as haunted by a postcolonial structure of feeling? A quick review of the criticism on Lorca suggests that this is not a line

²¹ See the discussion of this issue in Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 'The Language of African Literature', in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (see Spivak, above), pp. 285–90. The choice of the language in which the writer writes is crucial since 'language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world' (p. 290).

²² *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, ed. by Metcalfe Wood (London: Queensway, 1962), pp. 7–8.

²³ Roberto Fernández Retamar, *Para el perfil definitivo del hombre* (Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1981), pp. 237–38.

²⁴ (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arawakan_languages) [accessed 9 Dec. 2006].

of enquiry currently being pursued.²⁵ The gypsy language, Romany—or *caló* as it now known in Spain—was not spoken by all gypsies in Lorca's day, or indeed even in George Borrow's day,²⁶ and in any case Lorca did not speak it; thus it did not form part of the linguistic chessboard of possibilities available to him as he composed his *Romancero gitano* of 1928.²⁷ But I shall be arguing that it fulfils a function similar to that of the Gaelic substratum in Yeats's cultural imaginary.

How did Yeats express his Gaelic cultural imaginary? As his essay 'A General Introduction for my Work' shows, Yeats attempted to infuse English with 'Irishry', with its 'ancient deposit' (p. 518), its cultural memory, its narratives, the unconscious of the Irish nation. It is in this process of reinvesting English with the new syntax of Irish that Yeats was able to cathect his postcolonial anger. He provides some examples of what he did, and I believe that these need to be interpreted as metaphors of the ideological move he was enacting in his poetry rather than part of a conscious, empiric strategy. Firstly, he used traditional metre: 'Because I need a passionate syntax for passionate subject-matter I compel myself to accept these traditional metres that have developed with the language' (p. 522). Clearly Yeats saw the traditional metres as allowing him access to a (mythical Irish) past. Writing in modern verse simply cuts him off from that connection:

When I speak blank verse and analyse my feelings, I stand at a moment of history when instinct, its traditional songs and dances, its general agreement, is of the past. I have been cast up out of the whale's belly though I still remember the sound and sway that came from beyond its ribs, and like the Queen in Paul Fort's ballad, I smell of the fish of the sea. (p. 524)²⁸

Once more, as we can see, Yeats has recourse to metaphors—'the whale's belly', the 'fish of the sea'—in order to visualize that moment in which the past rushes into the present. But perhaps the most potent symbol is that of the ghost: 'the folk song is still there, but a ghostly voice, an unvariable possibility, an unconscious norm. What moves me and my hearer is a vivid speech that has no laws except that it must not exorcise the ghostly voice' (p. 524). This is in many ways the crux of the issue, for while the poetry is animated from within by a 'ghostly voice'—be it magic, the spirit of popular poetry, Celtic nostalgia, the figure of Cuchulain, or even the 'Sidhe of ancient Ireland'²⁹—the poet must not 'exorcise' that spirit, that is, bring it into the open. This would be to destroy

²⁵ A search in the MLA database suggests that there are no articles or books which address this issue (consulted 18 July 2005).

²⁶ George Borrow, *The Zincali: An Account of the Gypsies of Spain*, 4th edn (London: Murray, 1893).

²⁷ The notion of language as a chessboard derives from Ferdinand de Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale*.

²⁸ For Yeats's role in the Irish Revival, which peaked between 1889 and 1899, see Robert F. Garratt, *Modern Irish Poetry: Tradition and Continuity from Yeats to Heaney* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 16–43. For a discussion of Irish fairy tales, see Angela Bourke, 'The Virtual Reality of Irish Fairy Legend', in *Theorizing Ireland* (see Graham, above), pp. 27–40.

²⁹ *Magic*: Yeats, 'Magic', in *Essays and Introductions*, pp. 28–52; *popular poetry*: 'What is Popular Poetry?', *ibid.*, pp. 3–12; *Celtic nostalgia*: 'The Celtic Element in Literature', *ibid.*, pp. 173–88; *Cuchulain*: 'A General Introduction for my Work', esp. pp. 511–23, and particularly his comment that 'behind all Irish history hangs a great tapestry' (p. 513), and his discussion of Cuchulain at pp. 515 and 523; *Sidhe*: 'The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry', *ibid.*, pp. 65–95 (p. 74).

Cuchulain is the boy warrior celebrated in the seventh- or eighth-century Gaelic epic *Táin Bó*

its magic. Yeats thus remains true to the Symbolist creed, and its strategy of 'filling our thoughts with the essences of things, and not with things',³⁰ in order to 'evoke indefinable and yet precise emotions'.³¹ The many metaphors that Yeats has recourse to ('the whale's belly', the 'ghostly voice', the 'sound and sway', etc.) are not simply padding, since they embody the necessarily one-step-removed rhetoric of his poetry as it revives the ghostly voice of ancient Ireland. Yet it is a Celtic voice buried deep within the English language which, indeed, of necessity cannot emerge: 'For Deirdre and Cuchulain and all the other figures of Irish legend are still in the whale's belly' (p. 525).

If nothing else, Yeats's edition of *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*, first published in 1888, and his *Irish Fairy Tales*, first published in 1892, point to the author's fascination with ghosts.³² There is a section of the *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* devoted to ghosts, described as follows in the introduction:

[. . .] called in Irish, *Thevshi* or *Tash* (*taidhbhse, tais*), [they] live in a state intermediary between this life and the next. They are held there by some earthly longing or affection, or some duty unfulfilled, or anger against the living. 'I will haunt you', is a common threat; and one hears such phrases as, 'She will haunt him, if she has any good in her.'³³

Yeats delved into Irish folklore, and this resuscitation of the magic of the past was fashioned so that it had a political edge. Jonathan Allison has coined the term 'magical nationalism' to refer to this strain in Yeats's poetry, which he defines as follows:

Poetry such as this constitutes, perhaps, an attempt to re-write the story of the region and of 'the nation', using different paradigms from those used in the imperial British story. The process valorizes a vigorous imaginative and spiritual life, and is the basis for a movement of national redemption. Here is a politics of the marvellous, a badge of magical power, and of national identity. The process constitutes a form of counter-hegemonic magic, and of irrational Irishness, opposed to Anglo-Saxon administrative rationality.³⁴

A number of Yeats's poems visualize the point at which the dead return to haunt the present, and—put bluntly—scare off the English.³⁵ But this transmutation of Irishry is counterbalanced by an evocation which appears—at first glance—

Cuailnge [*The Cattle-Raid of Colley*]. 'Originally resurrected by scholars and writers in the course of historical and literary research during the nineteenth century, this Celtic Iron Age warrior came to inspire not only poets like Yeats but also some of the 1916 men such as Pearse' (Peter Costello, *The Heart Grown Brutal* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1977), p. 5).

³⁰ 'The Autumn of the Body', in *Essays and Introductions*, pp. 189–94 (p. 193).

³¹ 'The Symbolism of Poetry', in *Essays and Introductions*, pp. 153–64 (p. 157).

³² These two volumes were later collected as *Fairy and Folk Tales of Ireland*, ed. by W. B. Yeats (New York: Macmillan, 1973).

³³ *Fairy and Folk Tales of Ireland*, p. 117.

³⁴ Jonathan Allison, 'Magical Nationalism, Lyric Poetry and the Marvellous: W. B. Yeats and Seamus Heaney', in *A Companion to Magical Realism*, ed. by Stephen Hart and Wen-chin Ouyang (London: Tamesis, 2005), pp. 228–36 (p. 230).

³⁵ It is possible to read some hints of a postcolonial structure of feeling in the fairy tales themselves, of course, and not simply in Yeats's rewriting of them. The words with which 'Owney and Owney-na-Peak' begins ('When Ireland had kings of her own . . .') could be interpreted simply as a rewriting of the 'Once upon a time . . .' motif in fairy tales, or alternatively as a covert reference to Ireland's pre-colonized past; see *Fairy and Folk Tales of Ireland*, p. 356.

to be traditional in the sense that it recalls the great icons of the Western literary tradition: Homer, Achilles, etc. But this classicism is anything but the traditionalism we find in, for example, Housman, for the Greeks are used as a smokescreen to elucidate the birth of a new transculturated Irishry which is rebellious, revolutionary, republican, iconoclastic, utopian. Lorca, in *Romancero gitano*, does the same by having the gypsies of southern Spain rub shoulders with classical legends.³⁶ In the seventh poem of *Meditations in Time of Civil War*, entitled 'I see Phantoms of Hatred and of the Heart's Fullness and of the Coming Emptiness', for example, Yeats beings by drawing our attention to how 'monstrous familiar images' of ghosts begin to rise within his mind:

I climb to the tower-top and lean upon broken stone,
 A mist that is like blown snow is sweeping over all,
 Valley, river, and elms, under the light of a moon
 That seems unlike itself, that seems unchangeable,
 A glittering sword out of the east. A puff of wind
 And those white glimmering fragments of the mist sweep by.
 Frenzies bewilder, reveries perturb the mind;
 Monstrous familiar images swim to the mind's eye.

(*Selected Poems*, p. 140)

What is curious about this first outlining of the ghosts which will haunt the rest of the poem is the extent to which they seem protean, distant, almost undefinable. The phantoms are described successively as 'mist', 'blown snow', 'light of a moon', 'glittering sword of the east', 'puff of wind', 'white glimmering fragments of the mist', in a crescendo which gradually moves from intangibility (mist) towards solidity (culminating in a 'sword') and then back to intangibility. Even when solid as a sword, the phantoms are kept outwith the ocular capture of the poem by being described as 'of the east', which allows a certain (exotic) distance to be retained. Why the east? It is well known that Yeats was given a scimitar by a friend from the east, and that he kept it in pride of place in the tower in which he lived (if such is the backdrop to the poem, which indeed seems likely). But it is possible that the easternness of the phantoms is linked to the curious mixture of the 'monstrous' and the 'familiar' which is signalled later on in this first stanza. Indeed, as we shall see, this insertion of an image of cultural strangeness can be interpreted as an image of the subaltern supernatural which is always threatening to break down the stability of the empirical here-and-now in Yeats's universe. I want to keep in mind Yeats's 'glittering sword out of the east', for, in a slightly different form, we will find it re-emerging in Lorca's poetry, mainly in the image of the gypsies, who are made of 'bronce y sueño'.

It is important to underline that Lorca regarded his *Romancero gitano* as a book which expressed the invisible reality of Andalusia: 'Un libro donde apenas si está expresada la Andalucía que se ve, pero donde está temblando la que no se ve.'³⁷ The first two poems of the collection are based on two 'invented myths', namely 'la luna como bailarina mortal y el viento como sátiro' (p. 54). What are

³⁶ The knife fight between the police and the gypsies is described as if it were a war between the Romans and the Carthaginians: 'Han muerto cuatro romanos | y cinco cartagineses' ('Reyerta', in *Romancero gitano*, p. 20).

³⁷ *Romancero gitano*, in *Prosa*, 4th edn (Madrid: Alianza, 1980), pp. 47–90 (p. 51).

these two levels in the *Romancero gitano*? In the same essay Lorca describes the interpenetration of the magical and the real:

Desde los primeros versos se nota que el mito está mezclado con el elemento que pudiéramos llamar realista, aunque no lo es puesto que al contacto con el plano mágico se torna aun más misterioso e indescifrable, como el alma misma de Andalucía, lucha y drama del veneno de Oriente del andaluz con la geometría y el equilibrio que impone lo romano, lo bético. (p. 54)

It is this mixture of the balanced geometry of the West and the mysterious poison of the East that is the hallmark of Lorca's gypsy ballads. I want to pursue for a few moments this sense of Eastern mystery in Lorca's poetry, what nowadays we might call its orientalism. In his essay on 'El cante jondo' Lorca traces the 'inarmonismo' of the 'cante jondo'—literally 'deep song', a type of popular verse associated with the gypsies in southern Spain—back to India.³⁸ Significantly, he fails to pinpoint its origin, saying: 'Viene de razas lejanas, atravesando el cementerio de los años y las frondas de los vientos marchitos. Viene del primer llanto y el primer beso' (p. 18). Lorca underscores the mystery of its origins—as indeed Yeats does, who is a poet even when writing essays—by describing the 'cante jondo' as a sphinx: '¡Oh esfinge de las Andalucías! [. . .] Se esconden los versos detrás del velo impenetrable y se duermen en espera del Edipo que vendrá a descifrarlos para despertar y volver al silencio . . .' (p. 20). If we were to apply this perspective to Lorca's poetry—namely the sense of the poetry expressing emotions, thoughts, and ideas like the verses awaiting the arrival of Oedipus to 'decipher' them—it is important to point out that, according to this paradigm, Lorca is most definitely not the deciphering agent of their mystery. 'Romance sonámbulo' is acknowledged to be one of the most mysterious of the gypsy ballads, and even Lorca himself once said he did not know what was going on in the poem: 'donde hay una gran sensación de anécdota, un agudo ambiente dramático y nadie sabe lo que pasa ni aun yo' (p. 52). It is clear that Lorca's compositional strategy does not imply that the 'duende' of 'cante jondo'—when incorporated into his poetry—is thereby clarified, explained, made transparent. Rather, Lorca sees himself as incorporating the sphinx-like knowledge of the popular archive—whether it takes the form of 'cante jondo' (a primitive Andalusian form of popular poetry), 'poesía popular' (popular poetry from all regions of Spain), popular speech,³⁹ or the vivid imagery of lullabies⁴⁰—into his poetry while keeping its mystery and the vigour of its impact intact. Lorca is attempting to provide a vehicle in which the subaltern may speak, even if he is at one step removed from its significance.

For both poets sound was clearly a crucial component of the strategy used to conjure up a sense of what Yeats called 'those footsteps over our hearts we call emotions'.⁴¹ 'Write for the ear', Yeats once told himself.⁴² I want to turn

³⁸ See 'El cante jondo', in *Prosa*, pp. 7–34 (p. 10).

³⁹ See, for example, his discussion of the metaphors of popular speech which describe a heavy flow of water as a 'buey de agua' (lit. 'ox of water'), or the sinuous shape of a river as a 'lengua del río' (lit. 'tongue of the river'), in 'La imagen poética de don Luis de Góngora', in *Prosa*, pp. 91–127 (p. 95).

⁴⁰ See his discussion of lullabies in 'Las nanas infantiles', in *Prosa*, pp. 141–68.

⁴¹ 'The Symbolism of Poetry', p. 157.

⁴² 'An Introduction for my Plays', in *Essays and Introductions*, pp. 527–30 (p. 530).

now to a brief exploration of what I call the 'tactics of sound' in Lorca and Yeats, for their work can be seen as forming an intrinsic part of the signifier-sensitive current within modern literature, which in turn is an offshoot of 'art as happening', art in the present participle, *significans* rather than *significatum*.⁴³ For a number of thinkers in the twentieth century, language became the site of a painful self-reflexivity; no longer simply a vehicle through which knowledge could emerge, language became itself the key to understanding some of the laws of the universe.

Plato's Idea of the table over and above the actual table before us, Christianity's sense of the soul as more important than the body, contrived to give meaning the sense of something inner even when hidden, as pre-given, as indeed the past participle *significatum* reconfirms. Modern art has stressed the need to replace the sophistry of depth with the kinaesthesia of surface. Vallejo's *Trilce* as much as Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* uses sound to create sense rather than vice versa. The Formalists thought they were able to explain the use of doubles in Shakespeare's plays by reference to the linguistic occurrence of doublets. Jacques Derrida played on the phonetic similarity of 'différant' and 'différent' in order to create a theory of meaning as perpetually deferred, perpetually different from itself. Jacques Lacan uses various phonetic puns ('le nom-du-père' and 'le non du père'; 'homme' and 'omelette' fused to form 'l'homelette'; 'poubelle' and 'publication' to form 'poubellication') in order to construct meaning;⁴⁴ Joyce fuses 'corpse' and 'copse' to produce 'cropse'; Vallejo fuses 'tos' and 'voz' to create 'toz'.⁴⁵ Yeats quite consciously used alliteration and sound repetition in such a way as to drown sense within the sound, as occurred in the line he wrote as a boy: 'They snatch with their hands at the sleep of the skies',⁴⁶ as did Lorca when he wrote lines such as 'El niño la mira, mira. El niño la está mirando' ('Romance de la luna', p. 13) and 'Verde que te quiero verde. | Verde viento. Verdes ramas' ('Romance sonámbulo', p. 24).

There is one question that still needs to be answered. While it is the case that the interest in sound in the work of both Yeats and Lorca may be seen as part and parcel of the signifier-sensitive ethos of early twentieth-century art, it is intriguing to speculate as to why this particular type of phoneticism should have attracted both poets. We have noted above that Yeats knew no Gaelic, and yet a number of his poems—notably 'The Wanderings of Oisín', 'Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea', and 'The Hosting of the Sidhe', to give a few examples—appear

⁴³ For a discussion of art as happening, see Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), esp. pp. 15–26, 59–65, and 84–89.

⁴⁴ For a discussion of the Formalists' views on language, see Raman Selden, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, 2nd edn (Lexington: Kentucky University Press, 1989), pp. 7–23. For Derrida, see *L'Écriture et la différence* (Paris: Seuil, 1973). For Lacan, see 'L'instance de la lettre dans l'inconscient ou la raison depuis Freud', in *Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), pp. 493–528. Of this latter essay Malcolm Bowie notes: 'Lacan steps forward as a writer and demonstrates his prowess in a self-conscious parade of puns, pleasantries, conceits, learned allusions and whimsical etymologies' (*Lacan* (London: Fontana, 1991), p. 67). See also Bernard Burgoyne, 'From the Letter to the Matheme: Lacan's Scientific Method', in *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan*, ed. by Jean-Michel Rabaté (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 69–85.

⁴⁵ For further discussion of the signifier-sensitive ethos, and the use of puns, see Stephen Hart, 'James Joyce and César Vallejo: Excentricity and the Disinherited Mind', *Quinquereime*, 9 (1986), 171–89.

⁴⁶ 'A General Introduction for my Work', p. 524.

to express a desire to bring the Gaelic archive back alive. We have also seen that Lorca, despite not being able to speak the language of the gypsies, also wanted to breathe new life into the gypsy archive, as if to achieve communion with that reality. There are those, of course, who will argue that this quest was doomed to failure before it had even begun, because instead of excavating the bedrock of Gaelic or gypsy culture, the two poets were creating an optical illusion, rather in the way that, because of the refraction of light, the bed of a river will look more shallow than it really is. When an incident ray of light passes into water, for example, because of its change in speed, it is refracted, and its refractive index is of the order of 1.333 (glass is 1.517, diamond 2.417). To pursue this form of reasoning in a slightly metaphorical way: what, we might ask, is the refractive index of myth? In other words, when a ray of light emerges from fairyland into our world, by what angle is the ray bent? These are, of course, unanswerable questions, not least because we are using the language of physics to understand a non-empiric reality, but they do allow us to visualize the depth of the problem. If the refractive index were of the order of 1.333, then it would look like Figure 1. When looking into the river we see the river bed where the dotted line is; it looks closer than it really is. To extend this idea to Lorca and Yeats, we would say that their work provides the ocular illusion that it captures the Gaelic/gypsy substratum, but in fact it captures nothing more than the Gaelic/gypsy imaginary. To use Spivak's terminology, we would say that the Gaelic/Gypsy bedrock cannot speak. But is this to take an excessively nihilist approach? Should we give Lorca and Yeats the benefit of the doubt?

Before moving on to test this hypothesis in the poems, I want to draw attention to two features of the strategy that both Yeats and Lorca employed. The first common feature is that the verse of each poet contains mythic figures who inhabit the poems as if alive; Cuchulain is alive in the world Yeats creates in his poems, and the gypsies are alive in Lorca's *Romancero gitano*. The second feature—potentially the more intriguing—is that both poets specifically have recourse to phonetic resonance and echo in order to conjure up their mythical worlds. We have already seen how both Yeats and Lorca clung on to traditional metres, which in turn made their verse more sonorous, more rhyme-laden, some would say more incantatory. It is possible that the use of rhyme—which, for some theorists, constitutes an image of the fusion of two separate realities, perhaps the past with the present—in the poetry of both poets is a compensatory gesture designed to fill the semantic void inhabiting the space between the Gaelic/gypsy imaginary and the Gaelic/gypsy bedrock.

As we have seen, the subaltern in the poetry of Lorca and Yeats 'cannot speak' in the Spivakian sense, or rather the drama of its arrival at the threshold of expression is given concrete form. In Yeats's poetry it is the spirit of Celtic culture—Irishry—which is eagerly sought after, but which is 'still in the whale's belly', while in Lorca's poetry it is gypsy culture that performs the function of the subaltern which cannot speak. This paradox—Celtic culture or gypsy culture portrayed as the point of origin which is earnestly desired but which cannot achieve embodiment in the present (understood in a cultural as well as a textual sense)—is central to Yeats's and Lorca's poetry. Its haunting presence—for in both poets ontology becomes hauntology—is best analysed in the context

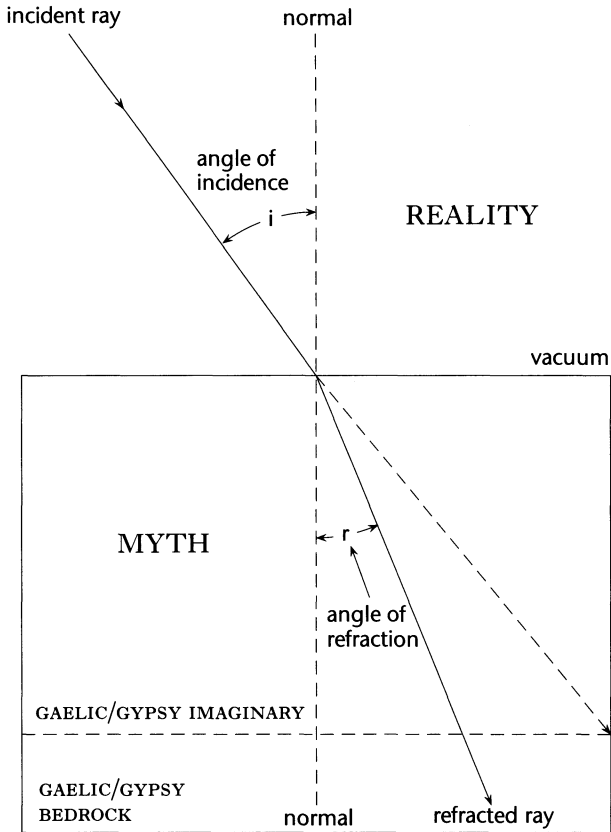


FIG. 1. 'Refraction'. Adapted from C. P. Harnwell and J. J. Livingood, *Experimental Atomic Physics* (New York and London: McGraw, 1933), p. 160, fig. 5-1.

of the cultural archive of folk tales, fairy tales, and orature. I ought to add that 'archive' is understood in this essay not simply as a narratological deposit (i.e. a space where stories about the past are kept) but in the Foucauldian sense of a reservoir whose boundaries are fluid and changing and which has a metatextual dimension. It 'emerges in fragments, regions and levels' and its 'threshold of existence is established by the discontinuity that separates us from what we can no longer say, and from that which falls outside our discursive practice; it begins with the outside of our language (*langage*)'.⁴⁷ One admonition from the fairies to human beings which is often cited, we may recall, is: 'Be careful, and do not seek to know too much about us.'⁴⁸

This sense of Yeats excavating a cultural archive which, in Foucault's words, 'falls outside our discursive practice' is evident in his haunting poem 'The Stolen Child', which was included in 'The Trooping Fairies' section of *Fairy*

⁴⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. by A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 130.

⁴⁸ *Fairy and Folk Tales of Ireland*, ed. Yeats, p. xvi.

and *Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*.⁴⁹ The first stanza sets the pattern for what is to follow: a brief narrative followed by a five-line refrain in which the fairies attempt to entice the child back to the land of the little people:

Where drops the rocky highland
 Of Sleuth Wood in the lake,
 There lies a leafy island
 Where flapping herons wake
 The drowsy water-rats;
 There we've hid our faery vats,
 Full of berries
 And of reddest stolen cherries.
Come away, O human child!
To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping than you can
Understand.

(*Selected Poems*, pp. 18–19)

The verses proper describe the world of faeries in terms of a wonderful exotic natural world ('moonlight', 'grey sands', 'wandering water', 'rushes', 'star', 'ferns', 'young streams'), which gradually entices the child so that, as the final stanza suggests, he goes off with the fairies:

For he comes, the human child!
To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping than you can
Understand.

(*Selected Poems*, p. 19)

We might also add—to misquote Yeats—that the poem's 'more full of meaning' than we can understand. The point at which the child goes over to the other side with the fairies is the point at which its intelligibility threshold is destabilized.

We find a similar evocation of the close connection between children and the world of the fairies in the 'Romance de la luna'. The poem opens with a description of the moon which comes to the gypsy child who is sleeping in the forge, attempting—as in Yeats's poem—to entice him away:

La luna vino a la fragua
 con su polisón de nardos.
 El niño la mira, mira.
 El niño la está mirando.
 En el aire conmovido
 mueve la luna sus brazos
 y enseña, lúbrica y pura,
 sus senos de duro estaño.
 Huye luna, luna, luna.
 Si vinieran los gitanos,
 harían con tu corazón
 collares y anillos blancos.

(p. 13)

⁴⁹ *Fairy and Folk Tales of Ireland*, ed. Yeats, pp. 57–59.

Though there are no quotation marks, it is clear that the poem re-creates a conversation between the child in the forge and the moon, a conversation in which the child is at first hesitant about going off with the moon, but as the penultimate stanza indicates, finally accepts the moon's hand and is carried off:

¡Cómo canta la zumaya,
ay cómo canta en el árbol!
Por el cielo va la luna
con un niño de la mano.
(p. 14)

And whereas Yeats's poem ends with the image of the child being carried away, Lorca's describes the grief of the adults when they discover the child has gone (for which we will read 'has died'):

Dentro de la fragua lloran,
dando gritos, los gitanos.
El aire la vela, vela.
El aire la está velando.
(p. 14)

Apart from the description of a child being led off by a supernatural force holding his hand, there are other details common to both poems, such as the use of a tight metric stanza (consonantal rhyme in Yeats's 'The Stolen Child', assonant rhyme in Lorca's 'Romance de la luna'), repetition of lines (the refrain in Yeats's poem, Lorca's repetition of 'Huye luna, luna, luna' in ll. 9 and 17), as well as the echoing of certain expressions (in Yeats 'Come away, O human child [. . .] For he comes, the human child'; in Lorca 'El niño la mira, mira. | El niño la está mirando', ll. 3-4, echoed by 'El aire la vela, vela. | El aire la está velando', ll. 35-36).⁵⁰

Yeats's poetry uses the imagery of the fairy tale and the folk tale in order to re-create a magical world. In some poems that supernatural world is a threatening, hostile one haunted by ghosts which unsettle the present. Thus, in 'I see Phantoms of Hatred and of the Heart's Fullness and of the Coming Emptiness', the appearance of phantoms is accompanied by the wind, as we saw above. We find a similar sense of the wind as a malevolent, threatening presence in Lorca's 'Preciosa y el aire'. A beautiful girl called Preciosa is attacked by the wind, which threatens to rape her, asking to lift up her skirt and desiring to run his 'dedos antiguos' over 'la rosa azul de tu vientre' (p. 16). One intriguing aspect of Lorca's poem is that the English are used in the poem to indicate the rational and the empiric, locked away from the magic and the supernatural world of Preciosa and the wind. The poem ends with Preciosa attempting to explain what has happened to her to the English, while outside the wind, furious, is biting the tiles on the roof:

Y mientras cuenta, llorando,
su aventura a aquella gente,

⁵⁰ It is significant that in another poem, 'The Crazy Moon', Yeats should draw out an analogy between the moon and children, in this case childbearing: 'Crazed through much child-bearing | The moon is staggering in the sky' (*Selected Poems*, p. 168).

en las tejas de pizarra
 el viento, furioso, muerde.
 (p. 18)

The important point about this poem is that the wind is associated with the unknowable. It represents the voice of the subaltern, misunderstood by the English and rejected as fanciful by the ‘man who travels to his work by Tube’;⁵¹ this voice is framed within the narrative of Lorca’s poem, but yet it is never truly heard.

In his essay ‘Magic’ Yeats describes the trance-like state that he associates with the act of composing poetry, a state which is neither completely conscious nor completely unconscious, but characterized as a liminal zone somewhere in between. Lorca’s ‘Romance sonámbulo’, as its title suggests, is a ‘sleepwalking’ ballad in which some narrative fragments can be pieced together, but it has an overall oneiric quality. If one were to provide an empiric reconstruction of the poem, one would say that it begins by describing a young gypsy woman as she lies, drowned, in the water tank at the top of a house, with her eyes open as she stares at the stars, while two men come round to the house—one of whom is injured in the neck, perhaps fatally—and break down the door in their desperate search for the young girl. There is a possibility that what we are witnessing is the result of a crime of passion, but this remains at the level of hypothesis, and cannot be independently and solely supported by the text. But this set of details allows us a way into the text in search of its hidden meaning. That the world being described is a liminal, hybrid world which is neither completely one of wakefulness nor one of slumber is suggested by the four lines that describe the gypsy girl in the opening sequence of the poem:

Con la sombra en la cintura
 ella sueña en su baranda,
 verde carne, pelo verde,
 con ojos de fría plata.
 (‘Romance sonámbulo’, ll. 5–8,
 in *Romancero gitano*, p. 23)

There could be a suggestion here that the gypsy girl is dead, since her eyes are cold (‘con ojos de fría plata’) and there is ‘shade’ in her waist—and this idea would seem to be supported by the reference later on in the poem that ‘las cosas la están mirando | y ella no puede mirarlas’ (ll. 11–12)—but then we are drawn up short by the reference in line 6 that the gypsy girl dreams on her verandah. To dream, despite its association with sleep, means to be alive. Rather than making us choose either one option (she is alive) or another (she is dead), the poem in effect holds both notions in dialectical suspension. As the poem gradually unfolds, it begins to evoke a consciousness of the world from the point of view of the ‘dead’ girl. The poem, as it were, begins to speak to us from the other side, as if the world is seen through the green haze which covers the ‘dead’ gypsy girl’s eyes. It is, once more, a voice whose origin is not recoverable to consciousness, the voice of the subaltern which is not spoken,

⁵¹ Yeats, ‘A General Introduction for my Work’, p. 525.

but rather evoked, hinted at, represented at one remove. In a lecture on Spain's lullabies, Lorca describes this poetic space:

He querido bajar a la ribera de los juncos. Por debajo de las tejas amarillas. A la salida de las aldeas, donde el tigre se come a los niños. Estoy en este momento lejos del poeta que mira el reloj.⁵²

It is significant that he should refer to that liminal zone where the 'tiger eats children', for it is precisely this space that 'Romance de la luna' attempts to evoke; this is the ballad, we recall, which depicts the child who is led away by the hand of the moon. The child is in a sense eaten/killed by the moon. Rather like Yeats, Lorca emphasizes the sound of the lullaby, its melody, as being more important than the sense: 'En la melodía, como en el dulce, se refugia la emoción de la historia, su luz permanente sin fechas ni hechos' (p. 145). It is intriguing to note that Lorca believes that he saw a fairy in his cousin's room in Fuente Vaqueros in 1917, when he was nineteen years old (p. 150). But perhaps the most significant point he makes about lullabies is that their vividness lies in their 'desdibujo' (indefinability). Thus, as he points out, the bogey-man ('el coco') is never described:

La fuerza mágica del 'coco' es precisamente su desdibujo. Nunca puede aparecer, aunque ronda las habitaciones. Y lo delicioso es que sigue desdibujado para todos. Se trata de una abstracción poética, y, por eso, el miedo que produce es un miedo cósmico, un miedo en el cual los sentidos no pueden poner sus límites salvadores, sus paredes objetivas que defienden, dentro del peligro, de otros peligros mayores, porque no tienen explicación posible. (p. 153)

The important feature of Lorca's description is the detail that the fear produced by the image of the bogey-man cannot be explained; we might say that it has no objective correlative. Whether as bogey-man or Sphinx, there is always a residue of the popular archive which cannot be explained away. In effect the subaltern is heard to speak but its meaning is never fully grasped. A residue of non-meaning always remains after the hermeneutic process has been completed. Thus, we do not know why the gypsy girl has died in 'Romance sonámbulo'; we do not know why her lover is mortally injured; we do not know how, if she is already drowned, she can 'dream' the world around her; in short, we do not know where the various voices are coming from.

As we can see, Yeats and Lorca—while to some extent peripheral to the discourse of modernity (typified by Yeats as 'the man on the tube', and Lorca as the 'poet who looks at his watch')—were involved in similar ways in the reconstruction of an oral, cultural archive which would allow something as non-rational as a fairy or the moon leading a child away by his hand into the realm of non-human life. Both poets were fascinated by the sonorous bedrock of poetry and saw it as offering a path back to a prelapsarian truth. Each in their different ways, Lorca and Yeats sought to express the voice of the subaltern—whether expressed as fairy tales, national myths, or lullabies—in such a way that its magic and its terror might remain intact. For poets and critics whose way of thinking is more in keeping with that of T. S. Eliot and Paul Valéry,

⁵² 'Las nanas infantiles', p. 143.

Lorca and Yeats will be seen as peripheral to modernism, peripheral to the *grand récit* of modernist art in the twentieth century. But for those readers who have a sneaking suspicion that there is more to this world than at first meets the eye, Yeats and Lorca offer valuable access to a world in which the little people lead children off by the hand, and gypsies are made of 'bronze and dream'.

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