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# Yeats's *Autobiographies* and the Making of the Self

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*Abstract*

Both in his prose and poetry William Butler Yeats showed a life-long interest in the shaping of the self, achieved through a careful rearrangement of experience. *Autobiographies* is a collection of texts written at different times intentionally arranged by the author not according to the order of composition but to the chronological growth of the subject, from early childhood to the Nobel prize award. Until the period when autobiography started to be recognized as a specific genre with its own rules, this work was resorted to as a support for the study of the author's production or as a key to discovering his life, disregarding the fact that autobiographical writing is not the narration of a life, but rather a narrative of the self as seen from the present moment of writing. Yeats's *Autobiographies* is the narrative of how he struggled to shape his own personal identity as well as the identity of the nation. Life stories flourished in the Revival and post-Revival periods in Ireland, thus testifying to a widely shared belief in the correspondence of individual and national destiny. Along with collective drives, personal reasons also compelled him to look back and write his own autobiography. The author managed to provide a text in which everything, from syntactic to linguistic choices, from his treatment of time and places to his presentation of friends and rivals, combines to give a composite portrait of himself from early expectations to final achievement.

*Keywords*: W.B. Yeats, autobiography, Ireland, identity, nation

«A poet writes always of his personal life»[1] claim the opening words of William Butler Yeats's 1937 in *A General Introduction for my Work*. This apparently unmediated statement is immediately mitigated by the poet, who first clarifies what he excludes: «he *never* speaks *directly* as to someone at the breakfast table» (emphasis added) and then asserts the intrinsic difference of the poet: «he is never the bundle of accident and incoherence that sits down to breakfast». The first lines of Yeats's essay summarise the two poles of a tension that plays a major role in the poet's whole production: the importance of the personal and, at the same time, the need to move away from it.

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Autobiographical writing, by its very nature, may result in a plunge into the personal, but, since «all that is personal soon rots», one should not overlook the careful devices adopted by the poet to pack it «in ice or salt»[2], directness belonging to ordinary people and not to poets.

Ignoring the complexities of the genre, readers of *Autobiographies* (1955) have often considered this text more as a source for Yeatsiana than as a work in itself: as an aid to unravelling the idiosyncrasies of *A Vision* (1925; 1937) – a remarkable instance of this being Joseph Ronsley's *Yeats's Autobiography. Life as Symbolic Pattern* (1968)[3] – or as a support for the interpretation of Yeats's poems or his life. This approach informs both the critical works on Yeats as well as the reviews of *Autobiographies*, as testified to by Eamonn Hughes: «This tendency to see *Autobiographies* as an adjunct to the poetry or as a form of secondary material is common throughout the reviews (as it was for a long time in the general critical response to *Autobiographies*)»[4]. Reviewers have repeatedly criticized the disappointment of readers' expectations of finding truth about Yeats's life in the book. In a seminal essay, George Gusdorf warned that an «autobiography cannot be a pure and simple record of existence, an account book or a logbook»[5] because «in autobiography the truth of facts is subordinate to the truth of the man»[6].

Both the idea of 'finding truth' and the whole concept of using *Autobiographies* as a support, as Hughes points out, have tended to decrease over time, parallel to the growing interest in autobiography as a specific literary genre. The famous lines quoted at the beginning, and their position in Yeats's testamentary essay, posit issues which have been largely overlooked for a long time. The growing critical interest in autobiographical writing has therefore also had an effect on the reception of Yeats's *Autobiographies*. In his *Autobiography and the Critical Moment* (1980), James Olney indicates the twenty years from 1956 to 1978, before his essay – the turning point in his view being Gusdorf's above-quoted essay[7] – as the period in which autobiography was recognized as a specific genre and received an increasingly abundant critical consideration, probably because it was «deeply embedded in the times and in the contemporary psyche»[8].

*Autobiographies* is not the 'narration of a life' but rather a narrative of the self. It is not, in Gusdorf's words, «a simple recapitulation of the past; it is also the attempt and the drama of a man struggling to reassemble himself in his own likeness at a certain moment of his history»[9]. In the delicate balance of fact and fiction, it is the latter that prevails, the narrative trend: as Mark Freeman asserts, «the telling of a life history is ultimately to be seen [...] as a fiction, an imaginative story […] it is an attempt to confer a measure of order and coherence upon it»[10]. The author suggests this view in the second paragraph of the *Preface* to *Reveries*, where he writes a sort of disclaimer of historical writing:

I have changed nothing to my knowledge; and yet it must be that I have changed many things without my knowledge; for I am writing after many years and have consulted neither friend, nor letter, nor old newspaper, and describe what comes oftenest into my memory.[11]

*Autobiographies* has a complex history and a textual and temporal multiplicity at its core: it is not a single narrative but rather a collection of different texts written at different moments and from different needs. The volume opens with *Reveries Over Childhood and Youth*, the first volume of his autobiography to be published, which was written in 1914 and published in 1916, and closes with *The Bounty of Sweden* – written in 1924 and published in 1926 – a sort of diary of the poet's journey to Stockholm in December 1923, which contains *The Irish Dramatic Movement*, the lecture he gave when he was awarded the Nobel Prize. Of the four intervening books, the fifth and the sixth were actually the first to be written, taking the form of private journals: *Estrangement*, published by the Cuala Press in 1926, is a selection from and a revision of diaries Yeats kept in the years 1908-1909, and *The Death of Synge* was likewise taken from his diaries of the period 1904-1914 and issued by Yeats's sister's publishing house in 1928[12]. The last book to be written was *Dramatis Personae*, in 1934, which was published the following year, whereas *The Trembling of the Veil* was written in the years 1920-1921 and published as a book in 1922.

Continuity is provided by the chronological succession – with some overlappings – of the history narrated here, from the poet's early childhood to 1902: *Reveries* cover the period 1865-1887, *The Trembling of the Veil* the years between 1887 and 1898, *Dramatis Personae* 1896-1902, whereas in the last three books this chronological sequence is no longer focussed on nor relevant. As a whole, the unity of *Autobiographies* is the result of the authorial act of arranging and ordering the texts to sketch the narrative of his self: in a seeming reversal of life, the «ending […] determines both the beginning and indeed the essential nature of how we came to be»[13]. The order is the chronology of the life, not of the writing, although one should bear in mind that the mature Yeats devoted great care to the ordonnance of the single poems within a collection, so that the succession of the poems was neither casual nor chronological but rather, according to Hazard Adams, led to a narrative which «was *not* autobiographically chronological but narrative-dramatic and fictional»[14]. Allowing for the necessary differences between poetry and prose, it is difficult to assume that a similar degree of attention, broadly speaking in the same period, was not bestowed on the narratives that made up *Autobiographies*, both in their individualities and as part of a single project.

Yeats carefully smoothed over the diversity and temporal distance of the different volumes that make up *Autobiographies* through his attention to style, language and ideas. He cleverly shaped the rhythm of sentences, at

times resorting to devices more typically used in poetry in order to orchestrate the music of his autobiographical prose. These are manifold: for example, Wulf Künne has shown that Yeats often uses sentences based on symmetrical units of two or at times three elements, mainly linked by «and» or «or» – as in the *Preface* to *Reveries*: «and have consulted neither friend, nor letter, nor old newspaper» – whose music is at times reinforced by internal rhymes. Repetitions of words or of units of meaning, reprises of images or simply echoes of things said, or a combination of these elements, subtly contribute to the reinforcement of the texture and to the partial erosion of the heterogeneity of the texts. Wright has also pointed to the efforts made by the poet to give unity to *Autobiographies*: an interesting example, which can throw light on Yeats's attitude, is worth quoting. This concerns the beginning of *Dramatis Personae*, where Yeats «links the development of his own life from one phase to another with the state of the great houses at corresponding times»[15]. In the very first line of *Dramatis Personae*, the

> [...] triple repetition of variants of 'three', in the references to the three demesnes, three houses, and Yeats's own thirty years, reinforces the impression that Yeats had become closely associated with aristocratic places when he was still a young man. Strikingly, the phrase 'thirty years' appears not only in the first line of *Dramatis Personae* but also in the first line of *The Bounty of Sweden*, which of course was written earlier; most readers will no doubt miss the echo, but if noticed it must reinforce our sense of Yeats's dignity and of the continuity between early promise and later achievement.[16]

Interestingly or ironically, the American edition, *The Autobiography of William Butler Yeats*, «published 30 August 1938 only in New York and which omitted the Nobel lecture *The Irish Dramatic Movement*»[17], gives the singular of the noun, not the plural. Although the 1958 American re-issue of the Macmillan, New York volume would include the Nobel lecture, the title remained in the singular, as testified to by Joseph Ronsley's study, *Yeats's Autobiography*, thus seemingly neglecting the plurality of the narratives and of the narrated I's[18]. As Warwick Gould reminds us:

> The title *Autobiographies* was settled by Yeats himself […] and *Autobiographies* it has remained in the UK and Commonwealth market […]. Yet, in the spring of 1937, H.S. Latham of the Macmillan Company, New York, sought permission for a single volume amalgamation of the old *Autobiographies* of 1926 and *Dramatis Personae* (1936). A letter of 25 March [1937] indicates that Yeats himself agreed with the plan, and the volume should be called *Autobiography of William Butler Yeats* [*sic*]. *The Autobiography of William Butler Yeats* it became.[19]

More than an intentional stance, it rather seems a slip of the tongue or, more probably, a further instance of Yeats's poor spelling.

The contract was agreed on 24 January 1938 and the volume issued that year. The *Dublin Edition*, for a differently perceived American market, remained *Autobiographies*

as in the *Edition de Luxe*, its title confirmed in the summer of 1937. Neither Yeats, Mrs Yeats nor Thomas Mark nor Macmillan nor Scribner's Son considered that the Macmillan New York one-volume title altered their plans for plural titles of Yeats's *oeuvre* in the two de luxe editions – *Poems*, *Plays*, *Mythologies*, *Essays*, *Autobiographies*, *Discoveries*. Nor was the title changed after Yeats's death […].[20]

Gould concludes by convincingly stressing the 'deviation' represented by the singular form:

> The *Edition de Luxe*, the *Coole Edition* and the *Dublin Edition* projects all agree on *Autobiographies*. *Autobiography of William Butler Yeats* can safely be disregarded as a radial development of the *Dublin Edition*'s delays. Yeats's plural titles were a congeries within a canon and there is therefore every reason to preserve *Autobiographies* in *The Collected Edition of the Works*.[21]

Gould thus gives definitive support from a philological perspective to what readers of *Autobiographies* have recognized; David Wright, among others, has pointed out that «*Autobiographies* […] treats Yeats's attempts to wrestle from a resolutely plural self a satisfactorily comprehensive 'unity of being' […] in an attempt to make his own life seem more coherent»[22].

The poet showed a life-long interest in the shaping of the self and in autobiographical writing. The lines written in 1908 – «The friends that have it I do wrong / When ever I remake a song, / Should know what issue is at stake: / It is myself that I remake»[23] – are paradigmatic of this attitude, as is his decision to omit them from his canon. Yeats only retained what can be considered a rearrangement of the last line in *An Acre of Grass* (1938): «Myself must I remake» (v. 14), which stresses the idea of the shaping of the self. This is also characteristic of his practice of packing «in ice or salt»[24]. In her authoritative essay, Marjorie Perloff examines «the 'stylistic arrangements' Yeats gave to his experience both in prose and in poetry»[25] and thus investigates «the literary devices that the autobiography proper […] shares with»[26] some of Yeats's mature poems, those she refers to as autobiographical. If this attitude is clearly given voice in Yeats's mature poems, with masterful examples culminating in *The Circus Animals' Desertion* (1939), the attention on the «I» is something that runs throughout his production, both in prose and in poetry: his early fiction is definitely autobiographical, and the struggle towards self-definition of the subject is at the core of his early poetry, even if the pronoun «myself» never in fact appears in his lyrics[27] before 1917: again, very tellingly, because what is omitted or hidden at the language level is very relevant for the construction of meaning. Yeats's is a life-long path to self-possession. Critics have stressed that from around 1910 references to autobiography can be increasingly found in the poet's letters, but it should also be remembered that at «the beginning of the century […] his poetry became much more naturalistically autobiographical than it had been previously»[28].

Eamonn Hughes adds that:

> While it is possible to argue that Yeats began to work on his autobiography as early as 1896 when he wrote the sketch 'Verlaine in 1894' which later appeared in *The Trembling of the Veil*, it is in 1908 that he begins to keep the journal that will later provide the basis for much of *Estrangement* and *The Death of Synge*. Thus, though it is difficult to set an exact date on the start of Yeats's autobiographical intentions, it can be said that he was writing autobiographical material up to twenty years before he finally felt the need to publish an explicitly autobiographical work.[29]

That year was 1914: it was then that he wrote *Reveries*, whose *Preface* he dated, appropriately enough, Christmas Day 1914, although the work was published two years later, in 1916; 1914 is also the year in which *Responsibilities* was published, the collection whose concluding lines are an attack on George Moore. The role of George Moore's *Hail and Farewell* (1925) as a spur to the composition of *Autobiographies* is widely recognized.

*Reveries* has also been seen as a response to James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), which Yeats had read serialized in «The Egoist». In both texts, the origin of the I is linked to the origin of the world, and both texts depict an «artist as a young man, and both works exploit changing styles to dramatise mimetically a developing consciousness»[30].

These were years of intense and widespread autobiographical writing: the people who, to some extent, had taken part in the Revival, or who had simply lived in the period, felt the need to write down their lives. Eamonn Hughes has emphasized the abundance of autobiographies in the period:

> It is difficult to be precise about the number of Revival period autobiographies; the standard timeframe – 1890-1922 – yields about 160 autobiographies but this cut-off date ignores the necessarily retrospective nature of autobiography. Extending the timeframe by another twenty years adds roughly 200 more examples, including the whole of Yeats's *Autobiographies* (only *Reveries over Childhood and Youth* and *The Trembling of the Veil* had appeared by 1922) […] The prevalence of the genre, particularly in the multi-volume form which it frequently takes, and of more broadly autobiographical concerns within other forms of writing, demonstrates that identity – personal as well as national – is anxiously returned to throughout the period.[31]

As to why identity is so important, Michael Kenneally writes: «[the] perception of a special relationship between self and nation, the tendency to explore and define oneself in terms of patriotic values and national goals, to equate one's development with national destiny provides the central structural metaphor of twentieth-century Irish literary autobiographies»[32]. Throughout *Autobiographies* Yeats's effort at moulding himself runs parallel to his attempt at shaping «the soft wax»[33] of his own country, so that his as well as others' autobiographical writings «function simultaneously as individual life stories and as cultural narratives»[34].

Not only is the equation of self and nation archetypal, it should also be remembered what, in Yeats's case, is certainly important: the struggle for predominance, the need to provide «his own version of the story»[35], that is, the need to be the one who will authoritatively undersign it. In a letter to Lady Gregory dated 20 November 1914, the poet expresses his awareness of such a collective picture: «I think we shall live as a generation as the Young Irelanders did. We shall not be detached figures. I think it is partly with that motive I am trying for instance to improve my sisters' and publish my father's letters. Your biography when it comes will complete the image»[36].

When Katherine Tynan's autobiography, *Twenty-Five Years: Reminiscences*, came out in 1913, Yeats's reaction was not wholly positive: the poet felt a certain unease when reading his portrait as a naïve and dreamy young man, and even more so when he found out that she had used some of his letters without even telling him.

Lady Gregory had published in the same year *Our Irish Theatre, A Chapter in Autobiography*, and Yeats «was also aware of Synge's fragmentary and unpublished autobiography»[37].

The writing of autobiography is usually recognized as consequent to a moment of crisis – «an experiential rift»[38] – which compels the narrator to re-examine their past, or, as Jean Starobinski writes: «One would hardly have sufficient motive to write an autobiography had not some radical change occurred in his life»[39]. The abundance of autobiographical writing in the period might be related to the perceived strain and struggle of living in the dawning of the nation:

> The identification of self with national destiny was possible, of course, only while the Irish nation was perceived as being in a state of becoming. Thus, an Ireland already awakened but not yet free could accommodate a diverse range of national images: the urbane and artistically sensitive society of Moore, the Unity of Culture of Yeats, the socialist dream of O'Casey, the Gaelic world of O'Connor, the ideal republic of O'Faolain.[40]

This has resulted in a sort of collective portrait of the period in Ireland – «most of the great twentieth-century literary self-portraits overlap in their reference to major political and social changes which occurred in Ireland during the 1890s to 1920s»[41] – therefore increasing the need to be the one who gave the definitive version.

Moreover, in terms of his personal life, *Reveries* came after a period of crisis for the poet: the controversy over *The Playboy of the Western World* in 1907, together with the controversy over the Hugh Lane pictures a few years later, marked a strong distancing from the Catholic middle-class and the awareness of Yeats's distance from the increasingly strengthening forces in nationalist Ireland. The years of the Abbey, which were both fatiguing and enthusiastic in their project and allegiances but also in the rivalries they established, were

extremely influential in the definition of Yeats's personality, his relationship with his Irish audience, and his stance towards Irish nationalism. Moreover, the publication in 1908 «of Yeats's *Collected Works* must have seemed to the poet to mark off an era, as though his achievement were already in the past. At this time we find […] an increasing identification with the past, and with his dead friends of the 1890s in particular»[42]. Synge's early death in 1909 all but increased this.

In the complex texture of life-writing, Yeats's decision to write his autobiography was therefore due not only to a response to the former friend and present slanderer – George Moore – or to a confrontation with the new great writer of Ireland – James Joyce – but represented a new way of expressing his life-long interest in the self. Fletcher speaks of a «process of mythologizing himself»[43] which started with *The Green Helmet* (1910), and he points out that around the end of the first decade of the 20th century «we find him [Yeats] referring to himself as "belonging to the fabulous ages" and "becoming mythical even to myself"»[44], concluding that in *Autobiographies* Yeats mythologizes his past. Mythologization of the past is a practice Yeats developed in his early poetic production: generally speaking, what is far-away in time and place is seen as mythical, positive, related to happiness – and irremediably lost. Having acquired mastery over this practice in the previous years, when Yeats feels the need to give 'his version of the story' he can safely resort to it.

*Reveries*, conceived as *Memory Harbour*[45], shows the growth of the poet from early childhood to the publication of his «first book of poems» (*Au*, 107).

The focussing at the beginning of *Reveries* is slow: the opening equates his first memories with «some first moments of the Seven Days» (*Au*, 42), a setting which is both pre-temporal and mythical: «It seems as if time had not yet been created» (*ibidem*). The uncertainty of time is conveyed through the use of uncertain temporal determinations and omissions of memory: «One day» (*Au*, 45), «Sometimes» (*Au*, 49), «I do not know how old I was (for all these events seem at the same distance)» (*ibidem*), «at some time or other», «at another time», or «presently», which occurs 19 times in *Reveries*. As Marjorie Perloff writes, «The word "now" similarly functions as a deceptive time cue; one never knows when "now" is in relation to past and future». Another «'pseudo-time signal' frequently found in *Autobiographies* is "I began to…"»[46]. Even the year when his «first book of poems» (*Au*, 107) was published is not mentioned, thus contributing to this blurred temporal setting, although the excision is also due to the fact that, chronologically speaking, it would belong to *Four Years: 1887-1891*, the first volume of *The Trembling of the Veil*. Yeats's manipulation of time creates «an impression of timelessness»; the omission of «specific allusions to dates and to historical sequences»[47] is a means through which the poet «wishes to create new connections among phases of his life, and thus in effect to change the shape of the life»[48]. Yeats's evasive treatment of time continues also in *The Trembling of the Veil*, even if its beginning seems

to suggest «a striking contrast to this manner, with its firm, precise initial section-title 'Four Years: 1887-1891' and its brisk opening phrase "At the end of the eighties"»[49].

If in *Reveries* the temporal definitions are always blurred, uncertain and almost irrelevant, place, on the other hand, is central, and its prominence over time – thanks to its relation to emotion – is expressed in the first paragraph: «It seems as if time had not yet been created, for all thoughts are connected with emotion and *place* without sequence» (*Au*, 42, emphasis added). In the very first lines place is localised as the places where his life would later be set: Ireland («an Irish window», *ibidem*), which is later defined as Sligo – and the area close to it – Dublin, and London («a window in London», *ibidem*). Here Yeats establishes «Sligo as a place of Edenic innocence»[50]; in *Reveries* he builds an opposition between his beloved west of Ireland and London: where the former is sketched as a place of freedom, beauty and magic, the latter is characterized by «constriction, ugliness, vulgarity, insecurity, bad taste. Dublin, the locale of the last third of Reveries, is somewhere in between these poles»[51]. The celebration of Irish space is also typical of his early poetic production, a phase well concluded by 1914, and whose results the poet has acquired by the time he starts to write *Reveries*: after an initial phase of uncertain and evocative oriental settings, in his early poetry Irish space – more properly the west of Ireland – is explored and cherished. The rural utopia reaches its climax in *The Lake Isle of Innisfree* (1893) – «my first lyric with anything in its rhythm of my own music» (*Au*, 139) –, which constitutes an important *unicum* in his early production, being the only poem in which happiness – which is here named «peace» – is located in the future, and thus attainable instead of lost forever in the past, as it characteristically is in his production of the period.

*Autobiographies* offers the composite portrait of the author, and *Reveries* is not the record of the poet's past: it is the narrative of his becoming what he is at the moment of writing. W.B. Yeats is very careful in structuring the text so that, on the one hand, it is believable as the story of a childhood, and on the other shows his life-long effort at shaping his self. The focus is on him, the hero, who, facing manifold adversities, hindered by antagonists or 'enemies' or by external circumstances, or helped by friends and circumstances, undertakes his own personal quest: becoming a poet.

In this spatio-temporal frame Yeats creates the narrative of a child with its apparent naiveté and simplicity, obtained thanks to great effort and skill. He favours the use of repetitions, a feature of childlike language; he frequently uses «some» and its compounds and the indefinite article to give a sense of indeterminacy, thus shifting the focus of the narrative not to external events and people but to the subject. Therefore, events and people are relevant only if resonant in the self, which selects memories: «I remember the dogs more clearly than anyone except my grandfather and grandmother» (*Au*, 46). Thus, for instance, only a few people, like his grandfather William Pollexfen

in Sligo («I think I confused my grandfather with God», *Au*, 43) or his close Sligo relatives, are named: a personal selection of memories which favours the anecdotal structure of the text. The frequent use of «and» also recalls folk stories and oral narratives, and while it is a recurring feature of *Reveries*, it is also present throughout *Autobiographies*, as Wolf Künne's careful analysis has convincingly demonstrated. At the same time, in *Reveries* as well as in the other volumes of *Autobiographies*, the anecdotal structure favoured by the paratactic recourse to «and» can «serve as an excuse to arrange his work impressionistically», thus enabling him to cope with «the narrative continuity which make[s] him uncomfortable»[52]. The childlike view of the world is rendered, at a syntactic level, by the use of parataxis, with sentences connected through «and», and the insistent recourse to polysyndeton, which links without establishing logical hierarchies within the period[53]. This syntactic feature is replaced by asyndeton and by ellipsis – or other shortening devices[54] – in *The Trembling of the Veil* and even more in *Dramatis Personae*, thus revealing a striking difference from the prose of *Reveries*. It becomes the predominant stylistic feature in some parts of *The Death of Synge*[55] and in his Nobel speech in Stockholm, when the poet refers to Lady Gregory. The recourse to figures of suppression such as asyndeton and ellipsis helps confer definiteness and assertiveness to her figure. Vagueness of early memories, uncertainty in remembering, as well as claims to not understanding, or unstructured logical hierarchies, which were functional to the recreation of his youthful self, are no longer appropriate when he wants to pay homage to the two friends who collaborated with him, who appear as «aspects or extensions of himself»[56] and created along with him the Irish Dramatic Movement – «I felt that a young man's ghost should have stood upon one side of me and at the other a living woman sinking into the infirmity of age» (*Au*, 418). It is the assertiveness which also characterises Yeatsian mature poetry.

The protagonist's efforts at shaping himself – his «stylistic arrangements of experience»[57] – are repeatedly stressed throughout *Autobiographies*: «I have grown happier with every year of life as though gradually *conquering* something in myself, for certainly my miseries were not made by others but were a part of my own mind» (*Au*, 45, emphasis added). The narrative of the self which culminates in the Nobel award is a path to self-conquest, a life-long struggle to gain self-possession, which at times he is afraid of losing: «I constantly hoped for some gain in self-possession, in rapidity of decision, in capacity for disguise, and am at this moment […] no different» (*Au*, 269). *Reveries* ends on this dejected note: «When I think of all the books I have read, and of the wise words I have heard spoken, and of the anxiety I have given to parents and grandparents, and of the hopes that I have had, all life weighed in the scales of my own life seems to me a preparation for something that never happens» (*Au*, 108). The heaviness of heart that marks the conclusion of the first volume of *Autobiographies* is symmetrically juxtaposed to the very last section of the whole book, where this mood is reversed beyond expectation.

*Notes*

[1] W.B. Yeats, *A General Introduction for my Work*, in Id., *Essays and Introductions*, Macmillan, New York 1961, p. 509.

[2] Ivi, p. 522.

[3] J. Ronsley, *Yeats's Autobiography. Life as Symbolic Pattern*, Harvard UP, Cambridge 1968.

[4] E. Hughes, *"You need not fear that I am not amiable": Reading Yeats (Reading) Autobiographies*, «Yeats Annual», 12, *A Special Number – That Accusing Eye – Yeats and his Irish Readers*, ed. by W. Gould, E. Longley, Palgrave MacMillan, Basingstoke 1996, pp. 84-116. This quotation p. 85.

[5] G. Gusdorf, *Conditions and Limits of Autobiography* (1956), in J. Olney (ed.), *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, Princeton UP, Princeton 1980, pp. 28-48. This quotation p. 42.

[6] Ivi, p. 43.

[7] «[I]t is only with Gusdorf's essay ["Conditions et limites de l'autobiographie"] [… ] that all the questions and concerns […] that have preoccupied students of autobiography from 1956 to 1978 were first fully and clearly laid out and given comprehension and brilliant, if necessarily brief, consideration». J. Olney, *Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical, and Bibliographical Introduction*, in Id. (ed.), *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, cit., pp. 3-27. This quotation p. 11.

[8] *Ibidem*.

[9] G. Gusdorf, *Conditions and Limits of Autobiography*, cit., p. 43.

[10] M. Freeman, *Rewriting the Self: History, Memory, Narrative*, Routledge, New York 1993, p. 30.

[11] W.B. Yeats, *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats, Volume III*: *Autobiographies*, ed. by W.H. O'Donnell, D.N. Archibald, J. Fraser Cocks, Scribner, New York 1999, p. 39. Quotations from *Autobiographies* will be given in brackets as *Au* followed by page number.

[12] The textual history is rather complex. For a thorough survey, see W.H. O'Donnell, *Textual Introduction*, in W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, cit., pp. 13-29, and also C. Bradford, *Yeats at Work*, Southern Illinois UP, Carbondale 1965.

[13] M. Freeman, *Rewriting the Self: History, Memory, Narrative*, cit., p. 30.

[14] H. Adams, *The Book of Yeats's Poems*, The Florida State UP, Tallahassee 1990, p. 11.

[15] D. Wright, *Yeats's Myth of Self: The Autobiographical Prose*, Gill and Macmillan, Dublin 1987, p. 72.

[16] *Ibidem*.

[17] W.H. O'Donnell, *Textual Introduction*, cit., p. 27.

[18] C. Lynch, *Irish Autobiography – Stories of Self in the Narrative of a Nation*, Peter Lang, Oxford 2009, pp. 42-43, titles a section of her first chapter *The Plural 'I'*, to indicate one of the features of Irish autobiography, to which I will come back later. She underlines the interplay of «the individual life expressly within the experience of the group. Through this technique Irish autobiography became pluralized, demonstrating the multiple lives of the author and others in more balanced proportions. [...] individual autobiographical identity cannot be kept distinct from consideration of a group identity». My use of the noun plurality thus, echoes Lynch's text, but my accent is on the plurality of the narrated selves.

[19] W. Gould, *Singular Pluralities: Titles of Yeats's "Autobiographies"*, «Yeats Annual», 11, 1994, pp. 205-218. This quotation: p. 213.

[20] *Ibidem*.

[21] Ivi, p. 216.

[22] D. Wright, *Yeats's Myth of Self: The Autobiographical Prose*, cit., p. 37.

[23] P. Allt, R.K. Alspach (eds), *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats*, Macmillan, New York 1957, p. 778.

[24] W.B. Yeats, *A General Introduction for my Work*, cit., p. 552.

[25] M. Perloff, *"The Tradition of Myself": The Autobiographical Mode of Yeats*, «Journal of Modern Literature», 4, 1975, pp. 529-573. This quotation p. 533.

[26] Ivi, p. 538.

[27] Or better, it occurs only in the long poems and in those lyrics not included in the canon.

[28] D. Wright, *Yeats's Myth of Self: The Autobiographical Prose*, cit., p. 92.

[29] E. Hughes, *"You need not fear that I am not amiable": Reading Yeats (Reading) Autobiographies*, cit., p. 87.

[30] D. Wright, *Yeats's Myth of Self: The Autobiographical Prose*, cit., p. 35.

[31] E. Hughes, *"The Fact of Me-ness": Autobiographical Writing in the Revival Period*, «Irish University Review», 33, 2003, pp. 28-45. This quotation p. 31.

[32] M. Kenneally, *The Autobiographical Imagination and Irish Literary Autobiographies*, in M. Allen, A. Wilcox (eds), *Critical Approaches to Anglo-Irish Literature*, Barnes and Noble, Totowa 1989, pp. 111-131. This quotation p. 123.

[33] This noun phrase occurs twice: once in *Reveries Over Childhood and Youth*, XXIX, p. 104: «I began to plot and scheme how one might seal with the right image the soft wax before it began to harden» and once in *The Trembling of the Veil, II. Ireland After Parnell*, I, p. 169: «the sudden certainty that Ireland was to be like soft wax for years to come, was a moment of supernatural insight».

[34] B. Schrank, *Creating the self, Recreating the Nation: The Politics of Irish Literary Autobiography from Moore to Behan*, in L. Harte (ed.), *Modern Irish Autobiography – Self, Nation and Society*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2007, pp. 32-50. This quotation p. 33.

[35] See I. Fletcher, *Rhythm and Pattern in "Autobiographies"*: «he was deliberately creating a version of the modern history of Ireland, […] a version he wished to transmit as a document to posterity», in H. Bloom (ed.), *Modern Critical Views – William Butler Yeats*, Chelsea House, New York 1986, pp. 73-94. This quotation p. 76.

[36] I. Fletcher, *Rhythm and Pattern in "Autobiographies"*, cit., p. 75.

[37] E. Hughes, *"You need not fear that I am not amiable": Reading Yeats (Reading) Autobiographies*, cit., p. 88.

[38] M. Freeman, *Rewriting the Self: history, memory, narrative*, cit., p. 36.

[39] J. Starobinski, *The Style of Autobiography*, in J. Olney (ed.), *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, cit., pp. 73-83. This quotation p. 78.

[40] M. Kenneally, *The Autobiographical Imagination and Irish Literary Autobiographies*, cit., p. 124.

[41] Ivi, p. 111.

[42] I. Fletcher, *Rhythm and Pattern in "Autobiographies"*, cit., p. 74.

[43] *Ibidem*.

[44] *Ibidem*.

[45] See W. Gould, *Titles of Yeats's "Autobiographies"*, cit., pp. 205-211.

[46] M. Perloff, *"The Tradition of Myself": The Autobiographical Mode of Yeats*, cit., p. 540.

[47] D. Wright, *Yeats's Myth of Self: The Autobiographical Prose*, cit., p. 40.

[48] Ivi, p. 41.

[49] *Ibidem*.

[50] M. Perloff, *"The Tradition of Myself": The Autobiographical Mode of Yeats*, cit., p. 542.

[51] *Ibidem*.

[52] D. Wright, *Yeats's Myth of Self: The Autobiographical Prose*, cit., p. 61.

[53] See W. Künne, *Konzeption und Stil von Yeats' "Autobiographies„*, Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, Bonn 1972, pp. 84-85.

[54] «Zum Asyndeon tritt ein weiteres Mittel der Kürze und Prägnanz: die Ellipse in Gestalt von verkürzten Appositionen, absolute Partizpien und anderen verkürzten Sätzen und Satzteilen», ivi, p. 99.

[55] «Das Asyndeton wird bei Yeats zum vorherrschenden Stilmittel etwa in seiner Stockholmer Rede, als er von Lady Gregory erzählt […] oder in den mit Celebrations„ und "Detractions„ überschriebenen Abschnitten von "The Death of Synge„ […]». *Ibidem*.

[56] D. Wright, *Yeats's Myth of Self: The Autobiographical Prose*, cit., p. 52.

[57] W.B. Yeats, *Introduction to "A Vision"*, in Id., *A Vision and Related Writings*, ed. and selected by A.N. Jeffares, Arena, London 1990, p. 86.

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