

The History of My Family: W. B. Yeats's "Leda", Her Murder and Why He Abandoned His Son

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Abstract:

William Butler Yeats had an extra-marital lover, Lily O'Neill or Honor Bright, from 1918 to 1925. Garda Superintendent Leopold Dillon murdered her on orders from Kevin O'Higgins, Minister of Justice of the Irish Free State. George, Yeats's wife, reported falsely that Lily was a Republican spy. O'Higgins wanted to restore credence in the Free State, which would otherwise have been reclaimed by the British due to maladministration. Afterwards a bogus trial was concocted outside the court circuit by Chief Superintendent David Neligan, at which Lily was reinvented as a prostitute to conceal Yeats's affair and son and hide the involvement of Free State officials. On the strength of false evidence the jury unanimously acquitted the assassin after three minutes' deliberation.

Keywords: Early 20th Century, George Yeats, Honor Bright, Irish Free State, William Butler Yeats

Introduction

This essay clarifies controversial events in William Butler Yeats's life, such as sudden heart troubles and depression from June 1925, his notorious Divorce Bill speech, the riots over O'Casey's production of *The Plough and the Stars* and Yeats's obsession with Purgatory. His wife George was his amanuensis; this essay explains her motivation for altering details in his works and hoarding his papers after his death. She insisted that Yeats's alter egos and "masks" were psychic creations of a genius; this essay shows they were real disguises that George had to suppress in order to hide her own role in the murder of Yeats's extra-marital lover.

This essay also connects my own family history to these events. It explains why my grandmother was murdered, who was responsible, and how the truth was concealed. It explains why my father had a different name in childhood, and why the Garda Síochána strongly urged him to not enquire into his mother's life. It shows why my sisters and I could see from her photograph that she was not a prostitute, and why the jury at the trial of her alleged murderers had such a different point of view.

The first stanza of "Easter 1916" reveals that William Butler Yeats never outgrew his childhood identification with the working class; he was still meeting them "at the close of day", exchanging "polite meaningless words" on the same cultural level. A theatre manager, astrologist and poet, he often changed his voice and appearance and by 1900 had established several active alter egos. The evocative phrase "A terrible beauty is born" made him a respected authority on politics; he was invited to Westminster to describe Irish attitudes (Maddox 1999a, 6). Nevertheless he still inhabited an upper-class world, not that of the Catholic majority. To absorb popular opinion he therefore regularly disguised himself to wander city streets.

Simultaneously the death of his father was approaching. Yeats would have to support two unmarried sisters, and was the only member of his family able to provide an heir (30-31), so from 1915 his aim was marriage for money and a son. Aged fifty-two he married Bertha Georgie Hyde-Lees¹ aged 25, who was affluent, spoke three languages, shared Yeats's interests in astrology and literature, and was keen to move to Dublin. This "[...]" bound him into a tight and familiar circle "[...]" (43) with Georgie's family; none of his relatives were informed until after the wedding. Before the event Yeats had nightmares (59), was in "[...] wild misery [...]" and "[...] ill and feverish [...]" (62). The marriage provoked "[...] disdain and back-hand laughter [...]" (64-65). Shortly after the wedding, George² began "automatic writing" led by spiritual "voices" emanating solely from herself towards her husband, which gave her control over the marriage and procreation (74) and cut him off from other occult people (76).

Yeats would often retire to the United Arts Club (6) and disguise himself with Abbey Theatre resources to walk around town³. At a dance club⁴ in March or April 1918 he fell in love; poems about a dancer appeared. Suddenly in late 1918 George wanted to move to Oxford.

¹ At Harrow Road Register Office in London on 20th October 1917.

² She had made her name masculine.

³ As he reveals in the first stanza of "Easter 1916".

⁴ It would have been teetotal and supervised.

In 1919 George published *The Wild Swans at Coole* but did not order poems chronologically. Those of 1916-1917 are Yeats contemplating his demise (see Yeats 1994 [1990]). In "Lines Written in Dejection" he writes:

I have nothing but the embittered sun;
 [...] And now that I have come to fifty years
 I must endure the timid sun. (195)

The tone changes in 1918 with "Men Improve with the Years":

I am worn out with dreams [...]

 [...] all day long I look

 Upon this lady's beauty [...]

 Is this my dream or the truth?

 O would that we had met

 When I had my burning youth! (185)

He explains in "The Collar-Bone of a Hare":

[...] the best thing is

 To change my loves while dancing

 And pay but a kiss for a kiss. (185-186)

He wishes to "change his loves" because he has fallen in love with someone other than his wife. He writes in amorous mode "To A Young Beauty":

Dear fellow-artist, why so free

 With every sort of company,

 With every Jack and Jill?

 Choose your companions from the best;

 Who draws a bucket with the rest

 Soon topples down the hill.

 [...] You may, that mirrors for a school,

 Be passionate, not bountiful,

 As common beauties may [...]

 I know what wages beauty gives,

 How hard a life her servant lives [...] (189)

George would not have been "free with every sort of company", being used to exclusive social circles. She always chose "[...] companions from the best", and would never "topple down the hill" of society. These warnings were for a dancer, a "fellow-artist" who "mirror[s] for a school", living on "what wages beauty gives" (189). To Yeats, George represented "all things known, all things unknown" (220), while the dancer represented "all things loved, all things unloved". Six months after marriage he was tired of "[...] the old bitter world where they marry in churches [...]" (186).

My father was born in Coombe Maternity Hospital in the Liberties, Dublin on 9 November 1920. In 1942 at twenty-one he enlisted in the British Army. As an Irish Volunteer he had to prove his age with his birth certificate; so he learnt that he was not Kevin McGill, and Margaret McGill was not his mother. He was Kevin Barry O'Neill. His mother was Lizzie O'Neill, also known as Lily O'Neill or Honor Bright, renowned as a prostitute in Dublin; she had been murdered when Kevin was four. No father was named. Mrs McGill admitted that she was his unpaid foster mother. Kevin planned to find out about his real mother after his army service, but instead he got married and had too many responsibilities with no money.

In 1953 Kevin met a Dublin GP, Dr Sexton⁵, who knew his history. My father began reading Yeats's poetry to me, and often showed me a newspaper photograph of Yeats. I did see the resemblance, but thought all Irish people were similar, as I'd never consciously met any apart from my father. He used to avoid meeting Irish people because of his illegitimacy and his mother's disrepute.

In 1961 Kevin returned to Dublin to ask Mrs McGill about his mother, but she had died. The area where he had lived had been pulled down and the people scattered. He made enquiries at Dublin Castle and the Garda showed him evidence associated with the court case. Kevin returned home with police photographs of his dead mother, the bullet that had killed her and a newspaper article about the inquest. On return he spent three days weeping, then showed us what he had found. From then on he made no further enquiries about his mother in case it injured his wife and daughters, as advised by the Garda. He intended to return to it when we had grown up, but died of a heart attack in 1980. Before dying he said he had always intended to write a book about his parentage. Afterwards I tried to research his mother, but had no idea of her real name or when or where she was born, so the project was shelved. Then in 2006 as an adult I saw a picture of Yeats.

⁵ From a medical family in Kilkenny, he was working as a locum in Britain in the early 1950s. He was called to deliver my sister, after which my father gave him breakfast. As he was on duty he could not stay to talk. He promised to return but died of a stroke that day. Kilkenny colleague confirmed that he had recognized my father.



Fig. 1 – Kevin Barry O'Neill in 1943



Fig. 2 – William Butler Yeats in 1923

Ezra Pound, with whom Yeats studied Imagism from 1913, defined an image as presenting “[...] an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time” (Pound 1916, 83). With this in mind I read Yeats’s poetry systematically for references to his relationship with Lily and their son, my father, brought up by Margaret McGill as her own child. Daniel Albright’s edition showed when he believed poems were written and published, explaining that revisions were made even after publication, making dates of authorship debatable (lxv-lxvi).

A mystery girl appears in “The Double Vision of Michael Robartes” (in *The Wild Swans at Coole*, written in March-April 1918, published 1919). Yeats dreamt of her dancing between “a Buddha, hand at rest, / Hand lifted up that blest [...]” and “A Sphinx with woman breast and lion paw”. Yeats is a live icon blessing multitudes, while George is a cold stone clairvoyant speaking riddles, and ferocious annihilator. He cannot forget “That girl my unremembering nights hold fast” and feels “A crazy juice that makes the pulses beat” that brings him to “the point of folly”; he compares her to the unseen “dark moon”. George is “the old moon”, who “lashed her tail [...] In triumph of intellect”, aware of “[...] all things known, all things unknown [...]”. Meanwhile the dancer’s “moonlit eyeballs never moved, / Being fixed on all things loved, all things unloved [...]” (220). George is sharp and vigilant, while the dancer is innocent and passionate.

Mary Kate Neill⁶, born 11 June 1900 in Graiguenaspiddoge⁷, County Carlow, was the sixth child of Michael Neill, a blacksmith. Having mother Kate and sister Mary, she was always called Lily⁸. Her father died in 1903⁹ and her mother in 1908¹⁰. Ireland offered no work without training, and no further education without fees; the best option was emigration. Their brother Edward was sponsor after emigrating to America in 1905 aged 20. Mary emigrated in 1907, followed by Patrick in 1917¹¹.

In 1918 she moved to Dublin¹², reputedly as sales assistant and model¹³, with tied board, lodging and clothes, meaning low wages. She was attractive and full of energy, and found evening work as a dancer in a club, probably to save for emigration. Her partners each paid for one dance, but she ignored them and “outdanced thought” (“The Double Vision of Michael Robartes”, Yeats 1994, 220).

“Michael Robartes and the Dancer”, also written in 1918, is an intimate conversation between the two eponymous characters. Robartes becomes a knight attacking a dragon to rescue Lily, who prefers the dragon; he is protecting her from her desires. He urges her to see her beauty in the mirror, but she is dismissive, preferring college; however to him her beauty excels books. There is a sexual undercurrent; they are speaking alone together. Michael Robartes’ lover was a beautiful dancer who wanted to emigrate, since in Ireland there was no hope of college for women¹⁴.

Yeats’s lover could not have been Maud Gonne MacBride¹⁵. Widely reputed to have been Yeats’s eternal love by most academics, by 1920 she was aged fifty-four with grown-up children and had made a career of supporting Sinn Fein. Yeats disapproved of her politics; her mind was “a bitter, an ab-

⁶ Lily O’Neill was the name she grew up with; in census returns she was called Mary Kate or Catherine; when pregnant she changed her name to Lizzie; in 1922 she (or Yeats?) changed her name to Honor Bright.

⁷ According to Inspector Patrick McGee of the Police Archives in Dublin Castle early in 2006. Confirmed by 1901 census and birth certificate.

⁸ 1901 census entry provided by Co. Carlow genealogist Ned Byrne (to whom my eternal gratitude) who recognized her name.

⁹ Death certificate.

¹⁰ Death certificate.

¹¹ Ellis Island records.

¹² According to Madge Hopkins’s Witness Deposition.

¹³ At Pimm’s ladies’ outfitters in Kildare Street or Switzers in Grafton Street depending on whose account you prefer. No evidence is given for either.

¹⁴ Subsidized Irish further education was provided for clergy and teachers only.

¹⁵ Maud Gonne was Yeats’s first unrequited love from the late 19th century. She married John MacBride who died in the Easter Uprising in 1916. Students are taught that she was the only woman Yeats was really in love with.

stract thing” full of “enmity”¹⁶. Nor was it her daughter Iseult, who was never known as a dancer and did not contemplate emigration or college. Between 1918 and 1922 Yeats and George were living in Oxford, while in 1918 Iseult was living in London, completing one year at art school at her mother’s insistence¹⁷ and starting an affair with Ezra Pound.

George was not a dancer either. In “Solomon and the Witch” (written in 1918) Yeats says:

[...] Maybe the bride-bed brings despair
For each an imagined image brings
And finds a real image there. (225)

Their sexual life was unsatisfactory¹⁸. Nevertheless “Under Saturn”, written in Oxford in November 1919, shows him very loyal to George:

[...] Do not...
Imagine that lost love [...] can make me pine;
For how should I forget the wisdom that you brought,
The comfort that you made? (227)

His recent “lost love” was Lily, whom George obviously knew about.

In “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen”, written in the same year, Yeats compared “Some moralist or mythological poet [...]”, i.e. himself, “[...] the solitary soul to a swan [...]” declaring “[...] I am satisfied with that [...]” (252). “Leda and the Swan”¹⁹ portrays rape between an older, powerful, experienced man and a young virgin²⁰. Being sexual it is not about George, to whom he had no physical attraction, despite their children²¹. His lover is Leda; their sexual relationship has commenced. Leda and Lily seem to be the same person, but the date of publication is 1923; Lily gave birth to Kevin in 1920. George probably withheld publication to hide his affair.

¹⁶ “On a Political Prisoner” written 10-29 January 1919. Cf. Maddox 1999a, 215.

¹⁷ Open University Making Britain Database: Iseult Gonne, <<http://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/makingbritain/content/iseult-gonne>> (05/2018).

¹⁸ Shortly after marriage she wrote “*Perché noi siamo infelice?*” (Why are we unhappy? in bad Italian) (Saddlemyer 2002, 101).

¹⁹ The given date is 1923; perhaps it was written earlier but not published, or in memoriam?

²⁰ The rape may be real or consensual.

²¹ As shown by his poetry about George, which is affectionate and loyal but never sexual.

Conceivably in late 1918²² Yeats wrote “Ego Dominus Tuus” (I am your Master) in Latin, the language of Catholicism, assuming two personalities, Hic (Latin: me), his public mask of “the unconquerable delusion, Magical shapes”, and Ille (Latin: the other) called Michael Robartes, a “spectral image” familiar with the straw beds or “[...] coarse grass [...]” and horses’ excreta or “[...] camel-dung [...]” of ordinary people. Ille says despite being “mocked [...] for his lecherous life” he has found “The most exalted lady loved by a man”, stating “I seek an image, not a book”, beauty and flesh, not intellect. The title tells us his “most exalted lady” is Catholic and their love is consummated, while Ille proclaims he is not referring to his wife. Ille has left an “open book”; his affair continues (210).

On 13 January 1920 Yeats and George embarked on the SS *Carmania* for a twelve-week promotion tour of America (Saddlemyer 2002, 238). On arrival in New York they met Yeats’s agent, John Quinn. Quinn asked his²³ new lover to hide in a cupboard and jump out before the guests; but while hidden she overheard them quarrelling. George was insisting on trying for a son; Yeats was dismissive (Maddox 1999a, 10). Soon after, George was requested by both men to remain in New York to visit Yeats’s father during his tour (*ibidem*, 28).

In the modern world Kevin would have been conceived around February 3, 40 weeks before his birth date; but 1920s timing of delivery was inexact²⁴. Kevin was credibly conceived on 7-13 January, when Yeats spent a week at Liverpool docks while George was in London (*ibidem*, 30). There is no mention of Lily in his 1920 tour itinerary²⁵ and she was not listed on their liner, but could have been a stowaway. There is no evidence to support or eliminate any possibilities.

The couple returned to Oxford late May 1920. In late July Yeats received an unexpected letter from Maud living in his house in Dublin, to tell him that her daughter Iseult was pregnant and her husband had maltreated her (Maud Gonne to W.B. Yeats, 29 July 1920; cf. Yeats, Gonne 1994, 405-407). Yeats had hardly seen Maud and Iseult since 1918; though Iseult undoubtedly needed emergency intervention, Maud, now a Sinn Féin judge, wrote that he was not required²⁶ (*ibidem*). Nevertheless, on the day the letter ar-

²² Yeats began writing to his soul or alter ego Leo Africanus (Hic/Ille) in 1915, but this poem was written later. The date given by Albright is 1917, although Yeats did not meet Lily until 1918; they were sleeping together by late 1918, according to his poetry.

²³ Quinn’s new lover. Lily was definitely not present.

²⁴ In the 1970s my own first pregnancy was three weeks longer than the estimated date of arrival.

²⁵ Nor was there any mention of women accompanying the Rolling Stones on their 1960s tours of America.

²⁶ Could Yeats and Maud have established a secret code or keyword that George was not aware of?

rived he rushed to Dublin to consult Bethel Solomons, a leading obstetrician (Saddlemeyer 2002, 258). But Solomons did not treat Iseult; after two days in hospital she recuperated at Maud's house in Glenmalure, Co. Wicklow (257). Yeats visited her briefly but remained in Dublin (258).

However, the date of Yeats's return to Dublin and visit to an obstetrician coincided with the fifth month of Lily's pregnancy²⁷. As an unmarried mother she was a criminal, without friends, employment, board, lodging or income (Rattigan 2012, 39). In tiny Dublin, Lily must have known Yeats's address, and that Mme. MacBride, known in Co. Carlow and Dublin to support the welfare of poor women²⁸, resided there; this Catholic judge and social worker could arrange board and lodging and also inform Yeats about her condition.

In the early 1920s "[...] loss of virginity was an economic disaster" (Maddox 1999a, 226). An unmarried mother would enter the workhouse²⁹. At the time of Yeats's arrival impecunious Lily, renamed Lizzie, moved into a tenement room³⁰ at 2 Catherine Street³¹, the same address as Kevin's birth certificate.

Yeats was a close friend of Oliver St John Gogarty, an Ear, Nose and Throat surgeon who provided voluntary surgery at the Coombe Maternity Hospital, near Lily's address. Gogarty (2001, 654)³² was well known for bawdy poetry and private help with pregnancies. The Irish land registry has no idea who possessed 2, Catherine Street, and suggests the original 17th century family still owned it³³. Gogarty's family was affluent and had property throughout Ireland³⁴. In the cellar of 2 Catherine Street lived Margaret McGill, who had nursing or maternity expertise³⁵ and later became Kevin's foster mother. Whoever helped Yeats find accommodation and facilities nearby at short notice was professionally familiar with the locality.

After marriage, George gradually became alcoholic, like her family's four previous generations (Saddlemeyer 2002, 24-25). She was over-cautious, hated routines or being observed, and camouflaged inner fears with external

²⁷ Counting backwards from the date of partition.

²⁸ Through her Sinn Féin establishment of "The Daughters of Ireland", *Inghinidhe na hÉireann*.

²⁹ According to archivists at the National Archives of Ireland.

³⁰ Each tenement room usually housed a complete family. Cf. Kearns 1994, 7.

³¹ Not the current Catherine Street in Dublin.

³² In 1903 he studied gynecology and midwifery at the National Maternity Hospital.

³³ According to the Property Registration Authority, Dublin.

³⁴ Gogarty's father, son of a medical doctor, owned two fashionable homes in Dublin, which set the Gogarty's apart from other Catholic families and gave them access to the same social circles as Protestants. Gogarty's family house, Renvyle, was on the West coast. Cf. O'Connor 1989, 12-13.

³⁵ She taught my father how to mend broken bones and bandage wounds.

joviality (22). Saddlemyer describes her as “solitary”, “cunning” and “wily” (22). She had a flushed face, suffered nightmares and walked in her sleep (25). Promiscuous female relatives, an alcoholic father and constant changes of home and school had made her desperate for stability.

“In October [1920] Yeats wrote on one of his filing cards: ‘Black Eagle = Heir = 4th Daimon’” (Maddox 1999a, 173). The following January George claimed to have had a vision of a black eagle (168) when she told Yeats about her new pregnancy; at that stage the gender would have been unknown. However, Yeats was writing about a real son or “heir”. His illegitimate son Kevin’s hair was black and his hairline was a beak-like V, whereas George’s son Michael had blond hair and a relatively straight hairline.

Whilst in America Yeats had been advised to have a tonsillectomy. One would have expected him to find an ENT surgeon in Oxford; instead, he asked Gogarty in mid-October to operate in Dublin and remained there a month³⁶. Gogarty told George “I have been too thorough”, despite exemplary qualifications and experience (169). Kevin was born in Dublin on 9 November.

“On a Picture of a Black Centaur by Edmund Dulac” (written in September 1920) is about Lily’s pregnancy. A centaur is a symbol of wanton male sexuality whose blackness denotes immorality. Yeats says: “Your hooves have stamped at the black margins of the wood”; the centaur has dabbled in adultery. He admits “I knew that horse-play [...]”³⁷ although he “ought to have stayed with [...] what wholesome sun has ripened [...]” (261), his wife.

The “horrible green parrots” were nationalists wearing green, parroting political demands. Thus, when he says he is “[...] being driven half insane / Because of some green wing...”, he means Lily from nationalist Co. Carlow. Nevertheless he has “gathered old mummy wheat [...]” (261). Grain from Egyptian tombs would sprout centuries later if removed from darkness and brought into light; Yeats’s meant his semen had sprung to life. This “[...] mummy wheat [...]” was exposed to light that “[...] baked it [...]” creating the “[...] full-flavoured wine [...]” of new life (261).

Yeats says, “[...] there is none so fit to keep a watch and keep / Unwearing eyes upon those horrible green birds” (261), Lily was informing him about popular opinion. He writes, “I have loved you better than my soul for all my words [...]” (261). Despite morality and conscience his love for her has conquered his soul; this and its intensity show it is not written for George. The given date was September 1920, just before Yeats had his tonsillectomy.

³⁶ In 1956 tonsillectomy was usually carried out on a kitchen table and recovery lasted a week.

³⁷ Adultery.

In 1922, when the civil war was over, Yeats and his family returned to Dublin. When he and George bought 83 Merrion Square, Lily moved to 48 Newmarket³⁸, changing her name from “Lizzie O’Neill” to “Honor Bright”, while Kevin remained at 2 Catherine Street using his foster-mother’s surname, McGill³⁹.

48 Newmarket, which Charles Lynch managed for his mother, was not a den of prostitution; by definition a prostitute has sex with anyone who pays. After the First World War young men disappeared, leaving young women and older men; extra-marital love was comparatively common. In Lynch’s house only two of the six lodgers had a lover⁴⁰; Madge and Lily were both long-term mistresses of affluent married men, one a Doctor and Peace Commissioner, the other a renowned Senator.

In “Meditations in Time of Civil War” (written in 1921) Yeats talks of his property: the titles of the first four sections are “Ancestral Houses”, “My House”, “My Table” and “My Descendants”. His “fountain” signifies legitimate offspring from a planned source, while the “empty sea-shell flung out of the obscure dark of the rich streams” (246) is an unexpected, fortuitous advent. Yeats was deciding which descendants to support: George with Anne and Michael, or Lily with Kevin. His vocabulary, pitch and metre reveal more elation at the second option.

In 1923 Gogarty, now a Senator in the new Irish Free State⁴¹, nominated Yeats for the same position; he immediately accepted because it was regularly paid, unlike his other occupations. Yeats was always short of money around this time (Saddlemeyer 2002, 312). Kevin was two years old. George befriended many of his colleagues in the Oireachtas⁴², admiring in particular Kevin O’Higgins. She invited him and his wife to dinner frequently so that he and Yeats became well acquainted (351).

O’Higgins was more interested in power than politics. Once opposed to the British Empire⁴³, he now supported it. In 1922 he established the new Irish police force, Garda Síochána. Eoin O’Duffy, another fascist militarist, was appointed Commissioner of Police in September 1922. The same year O’Higgins rose to be Vice-President of the Free State’s Executive Council, retaining his post as Minister of Justice.

³⁸ In his witness deposition in 1925 Charles Lynch said that Honor Bright had lived at 48 Newmarket for three years, two streets away from 2 Catherine Street.

³⁹ Kevin was then two; later the only surname he knew was McGill.

⁴⁰ According to witness depositions.

⁴¹ The Free State was a self-governing part of the British Empire, not independent. It had been controversially established in 1922 following the 1916 Uprising. If badly governed, Britain would abolish it and reclaim control.

⁴² Irish Government.

⁴³ He swapped sides to become Minister for Home Affairs in the Free State despite being an Irish Republican Army politician during the Civil war.

In March 1924 O'Higgins was nominated de facto head of government and by June was promoted to Minister of Justice and External Affairs⁴⁴. He appointed Colonel David Neligan (Michael Collin's famous right-hand man) as Chief Superintendent of his detective squad, the feared G-Force; Neligan was answerable directly to O'Higgins.

Between 1922 and 1924 George confided in him about Lily⁴⁵: Yeats might be passing state secrets that Lily could transmit to the IRA⁴⁶. Lily could blackmail him about Kevin⁴⁷. Since 1920 George had been threatening to kill Kevin⁴⁸.

Someone using Michael Collin's strategy observed Lily's habits and routines. Whoever surveyed 48 Newmarket discovered Lily's friend Madge Hopkins nicknamed Bridie, and her relationship with Peace Commissioner⁴⁹ Dr Patrick Purcell, who worked alongside O'Higgins drinking partner, Garda Superintendent Dillon⁵⁰.

Dr. Patrick Purcell, aged 30, had a practice in Blessington. Married with two children, he was having a long-term extra-marital affair with Bridie/Madge. Madge and "Lizzie" met when Lily gave birth, so Madge was also an unmarried mother in 1920⁵¹. Madge knew Margaret McGill, Kevin and Yeats because she knew "Lizzie" during her five years residence in Catherine Street and Newmarket. In "The Secrets of the Old"⁵², published in 1927, Yeats says of himself, Madge (Margery) and Margaret (Madge) that "[...] We three make up a solitude". George was the only person who could alter names in the poem, and also perhaps the first two lines of the third stanza, "[...] How such a man pleased women most / Of all that are gone [...]" (272)⁵³.

⁴⁴ The biography of O'Higgins is from Wikipedia. See Sources.

⁴⁵ A deduction made for reasons explained at the end of this essay.

⁴⁶ Kilmainham Gaol Museum states that Lily was never involved with politics during her lifetime.

⁴⁷ Whether or not she did. Lily is still regarded as a spy by Dubliners, e.g. Zanzibar Films "Honor Bright" (2006), which was never produced.

⁴⁸ "When George fell asleep abruptly, Yeats was informed (by a new communicator [...] speaking through George's mouth) that a Frustrator wanted to kill the Fourth Daimon" (Maddox 1999a, 169).

⁴⁹ Magistrate.

⁵⁰ "[...] he was regularly seen at [...] Fanny O'Grady's [public house in Cork] [...] which [...] was also frequented by [...] Kevin O'Higgins" (Irish Bureau of Military History 1913-1921, <<http://www.bureauofmilitaryhistory.ie/reels/bmh/BMH.WS1401.pdf#page=4>>). Mrs O'Grady was stating details about her lodger, Leopold Dillon, being involved in a bank robbery.

⁵¹ After Lily's death, Madge's witness deposition stated that she had known *Lizzie* for five years, i.e. from late 1920, the first time Lily changed her name.

⁵² No date given for time of writing.

⁵³ "How such a man pleased Lily most / Before she was gone [...]" would be more euphonious. Further research of Yeats's pre-publication poetic essays would be desirable.

Yeats introduced “Unity of Being” to encourage fusion of discordant elements of Irish society on becoming Senator in June 1924, when his Catholic son was three years old. That year Cosgrave’s government was attempting to prevent divorce. The Divorce Bill was outside Yeats’s usual remit, culture, but he uncharacteristically opposed Cosgrave. Ostensibly he wanted to marry Kevin’s mother, in which case an Irish civil divorce would allow him to marry a Catholic⁵⁴. Remarriage was doubtful under Roman Catholic Canon Law because of his occult activities, children and property. Moreover, an affluent Protestant Senator marrying a poor young nationalist Catholic woman with his illegitimate son overstepped boundaries of religion, age, money, politics and morality.

George would watch Yeats leaving for the Hibernian Club⁵⁵, between Merrion Square and Lily’s lodging. Only George and Yeats knew Lily’s address: Yeats visited, and George observed him.

Leopold F. Dillon was born in Cork in 1900; his prosperous Protestant family lived in Wales. He enlisted in the Artist’s Rifles Brigade for officers in 1919; however, the unit disbanded the same year, so he remained a Private⁵⁶. In Cork he was a regular visitor of the same public house frequented by O’Higgins⁵⁷. In 1924 he joined Garda Síochána⁵⁸ and after six weeks was promoted to Superintendent of three large police districts in Kildare, Carlow and Wicklow, including Blessington⁵⁹.

In early June 1925 O’Higgins requested Supt. Dillon⁶⁰ to eliminate her; the murder happened on 9 June 1925 between midnight and 3.30 am, in “wine-dark midnight”. The evening before Dillon had confirmed his order at O’Higgins address in Booterstown⁶¹.

⁵⁴ If the Free State did not rule in favour of divorce, Roman Catholic Canon Law would prevail: “If you receive a civil divorce, but no annulment, then you are still married to the other person in the eyes of the Church and would be committing adultery if you married another”. Also Matrimonial Causes and Marriage Law (Ireland) Amendment Act 1870: Protestant / RC marriage must be agreed by law.

⁵⁵ Now that he was a Senator.

⁵⁶ Information gratefully received from Mike Powell, historian of the Artists Rifles Brigade.

⁵⁷ Irish Bureau of Military History 1913-1921 (<<http://www.bureauofmilitaryhistory.ie/reels/bmh/BMH.WS1401.pdf#page=1>>): covering statement by Mrs Alice O’Grady, in relation to certain incidents in 1921. “[Dillon] was regularly seen [...] drinking at [...] Cork public house [...] Fanny O’Grady’s [...] which [...] was frequented by [...] Kevin O’Higgins”.

⁵⁸ Dublin Military Police General Register (1835-1925) and Civic Guard Temporary Register (1922-1924). From Garda Museum, Dublin Castle.

⁵⁹ Thom’s Directory 1924.

⁶⁰ Both were involved directly in the murder; O’Duffy was only involved afterwards.

⁶¹ In his defence statement Dillon reported that he had visited the street in which O’Higgins lived and spent an hour there in the evening before the murder. He was not asked about this in court.



Fig. 3 – Photograph of Lily O’Neill (Honor Bright) taken on 9th June 1925 by Garda Sgt. A. Gordon

Superintendent John Reynolds⁶² arrived next morning at the scene of the crime and requested photographs; one shows a crowd gathering. For months every newspaper carried a daily front-page headline about the murder. The public did not view it as the murder of a back-street prostitute, but as a major political event.

Reporters described the woman as mid-twenties, medium height with brown hair, wearing modest clothing; her left shoe was off her foot. In her pockets were cigarettes, matches, a powder compact and puff, coins and a rosary. She carried no identification, just an old scar on the left side of her nose. She had not struggled or been assaulted; her clothes were not ripped or interfered with. There was a trickle of blood at the side of her mouth and a bullet-hole in her chest (*Dublin Evening Mail [DEM]*, 10 June 1925).

The labourer alerted the local pub; the police were called. Afterwards the body was carried to the pub’s outhouse to await the Coroner, Dr J.P.Brennan (*DEM*, 10 June 1925). His first act on opening the inquest next morning was to lambaste the jurists who had not materialised (*ibidem*). He described Lily as a “decent, innocent victim of a heinous crime” and intended to find the “unspeakable reprobate” who harmed her (*ibidem*). Dr Brennan called residents from

⁶² Tom Carew informed me that John Henry Reynolds joined RIC before 1910, then Gardaí 1922, retiring as Superintendent in Kilkenny in 1954. “He was a very admired Officer of integrity, a neighbour whom my late father knew very well and deeply respected”.

48 Newmarket as witnesses, and most identified Honor Bright, except Madge Hopkins who called her Lizzie O'Neill. Charles Lynch said she had lived there for three years⁶³.

At 2.30 pm Dr Brennan suddenly announced that he was adjourning the inquest for two weeks "at the request of the police authorities" (*ibidem*). Commissioner O'Duffy, the highest-ranking policeman of the Free State, had unexpectedly arrived, stopped the inquest and taken over the case⁶⁴. Nevertheless, Dr Brennan angrily reaffirmed the "perpetrator or perpetrators of this atrocity" would be "brought to justice", and that "It is inconceivable that a monster of that nature, who is certainly responsible for the death of this unfortunate girl, should be at large [...]" (*ibidem*).

Yeats had been preparing his pro-Divorce Bill speech for months. Having caused controversy it could not be dropped, though Lily's murder had disintegrated his motive. It was debated on 11 June, two days after the event, on her twenty-fifth birthday, two days before Yeats's sixtieth on 13 June. He addressed a jeering, derisive House who obviously understood the circumstances⁶⁵ (Yeats 2001 [1960], 90-92), defended recent extra-marital affairs of famous Irish politicians, and apologised for his love-life: "[...] Genius has its virtue, and it is only a small blot on its escutcheon if it is sexually irregular" (92).

Chief Supt. Neligan took command of the case. No explanation was given for the involvement of Ireland's highest-ranking detective. On 11 June Supt. Dillon confessed. Chief Supt. Neligan arrested Dillon's collaborator⁶⁶ Dr Patrick Purcell two days later (*Evening Herald*, 13 June 1925).

Neligan's assignment was to exonerate the Justice Ministry by suppressing involvement of O'Higgins, Yeats and George, which meant publicly disassociating Lily and Kevin from Yeats. In addition he was to exonerate Garda Síochana by acquitting Dillon and Purcell, while suppressing the outraged public to avoid British review. To achieve his aims he kept Dillon and Purcell in custody, out of public view at Dublin Castle for seven months whilst manipulating evidence. A mendacious narrative emerged: Honor Bright was a prostitute⁶⁷; her son could be anybody's.

The bogus trial of the alleged murderers 1-4 February 1926, outside the official court circuit, was held in order to restrain public opinion. "An unusual amount of public interest was centred in the proceedings. From an early hour [...] a large crowd collected outside the Courthouse, and when the doors were open many sought admission [which] was [...] confined to jurors, witnesses and

⁶³ Charles Lynch's witness deposition.

⁶⁴ On Christmas Day 2006 I had a phone call from the second son of Superintendent Reynolds, the first police officer at the scene of my grandmother's murder. He told me of his father's great anger at being removed from the case, along with Coroner Brennan, by Commissioner O'Duffy. He remembered his father saying "Nothing good will come of this".

⁶⁵ Judging by the tone of the debate and the words uttered.

⁶⁶ Whose car had been used for both accused.

⁶⁷ Prostitution, regarded as a result of British occupation, was condemned in the Free State.

others whose attendance was required. A crowded court witnessed the opening stage of the trial, the attendees including several ladies⁶⁸ (*DEM*, 1 February 1926). The prosecuting counsel was William Carrigan K.C., a close colleague of Kevin O'Higgins.

In 2006 the National Archives of Ireland sent me copies of the witness depositions for the trial. The victim was never referred to, except for her name, age, address and location on the night of 8-9 June. Her son was absent; Mrs McGill was not called to depose. No witnesses were shown police photographs. No evidence was included about Lily's daily routines, friends, relatives or work, or describing her emotions and conversations.

On the first day in court, Carrigan established the sinfulness of the victim in contrast to the youthful, innocent defendants. "The woman was one of those unhappy creatures who, not through choice, but through some cursed necessity, was compelled to seek her living on the streets at night" (*DEM*, 1 February 1926). No character witnesses were called. All evidence concerning Lily/Honor was proscribed as "detrimental to Dillon's defence" (*DEM*, 18 August 1925).

Forensic evidence showed the bullet was fired six to ten feet away in the dark; Lily was smoking (*DEM*, 13 June 1925). The motive was never alluded to. The Belgian Army issue revolver was never mentioned, or that Dillon had served in Belgium.

Most of Dr. O'Mahoney's⁶⁹ testimony about the victim was false or deliberately misleading. She was well nourished and there were no marks of violence; she was not pregnant. The bullet had entered the left breast, penetrated the left ventricle causing blood to ooze from her mouth, and lodged under the left shoulder blade. The death could not have been self-inflicted (*DEM*, 1 February 1926). The doctor called her Lizzie O'Neill, the name on Kevin's birth certificate, but omitted to state that she had given birth (*ibidem*). He added that the handkerchief in her right hand held traces of semen, and that her vagina contained a "whitish" fluid, which would lead the all-male jury to assume she had just had sex, in direct contradiction to the Coroner's evidence⁷⁰.

⁶⁸ The "ladies" included Kathleen Barry and Mrs Sheehy-Skeffington from Maud Gonne MacBride's *Inghinidhe na hÉireann*. In 1927 as Yeats was leaving Ireland she wrote to him: "[...] pray to God to send men who understand what love of Ireland and of their fellows means to undo this mischief you – unwillingly perhaps have helped to do. For your poetry you will be forgiven but sin no more" (Yeats, Gonne 1994, 443).

⁶⁹ Who lived in Booterstown, as did Neligan.

⁷⁰ Coroner Brennan stated "two of the 'butts' of cigarettes were in deceased handkerchief on her costume"; he recorded no fluids. He stated that her clothes were undisturbed. From Brennan's witness deposition, later forged.

SAORSTAT EIREANN.

ATTORNEY GENERAL OF SAORSTAT EIREANN
 (Empowered)

Patrick Brennan
Lee J. Kelly

As Court Messenger Substituted
 (The District Court of Dublin)
DISTRICT No. 11.

No. **111** - District of Dublin
 Metropolitan.

Subscribed

The Deponent is *Patrick Brennan*
 of *Dundrum* *Sept 1925*

We, the undersigned, one of the Justices of said District Court, assigned to said District, at the Metropolitan Courthouse, King's Cross, in the County of the City of Dublin, do well certify, at the instance and request of the said

Fig. 4 – Brennan’s witness deposition, p. 1

head of deceased wanted
 coloured hair sticking
 produced there was an end
 of cigarette in his costume,
 a recent battle and some
 loose, patches of hair, ~~patches of hair~~
~~patches of hair~~ ~~patches of hair~~
 Exhibit B. That the body
 removed to Doyle's Public
 house deposited at his corner.

Subscribed on this 14th day of July 1925

Fig. 5 – Brennan’s witness deposition, p. 2

The photographs produced
 represent what I saw.
 The feet of shoes were about
 2 ft from ditch to side of road.
 The lower portion of ditch
 is about 2 rods and higher
 up for a few rods. Obvious photos
 Exhibit B. Produced.

Subscribed on this 14th day of July 1925

Fig. 6 – Brennan’s witness deposition, p. 3

The witness deposition by the Coroner Dr J. P. Brennan had been written on 14 June, just after Commissioner O'Duffy had taken over on the 10 June, but it was later forged. Brennan's name was crossed off the first page (see fig. 4); "Superintendent John H. Reynolds, Garda Siochana" was substituted in Neligan's handwriting.

On page two the Coroner wrote: "Photos A, B, C D produced" but "Photos" was deleted and "Exhibit" substituted; "B, C and D" were also deleted (see fig. 5).

On page three the Coroner wrote "I searched the pockets. I found [...] A face cream. Photo Exhibit A. Other articles [...]". However, these items were crossed out, so that "a Box containing Amalthusian Sheath were was also in Pocket" (sic) could be substituted⁷¹; a condom replaced the face cream (see fig. 6). Neither Brennan nor Reynolds knew of this transgression⁷².

In his final speech the judge explained that the jury was to ascertain the cause of death and nothing more, must pay great attention to the movements of the two accused and Bridie that night, and ignore "any opinion they might have formed from what they had heard", focussing only on "the facts placed before them"⁷³. The jury unanimously acquitted the accused after less than three minutes deliberation (*DEM*, 4 February 1926). After the verdict no further newspaper reports were made about the murder, the victim or the trial.

Yeats wrote "The Three Monuments" just after Lily's murder (in 1925).

They hold their public meetings where
 Our most renowned patriots stand,
 One among the birds of the air,
 A stumpier on either hand;
 And all the popular statesmen say
 That purity built up the State
 And after kept it from decay;
 Admonish us to cling to that
 And let all base ambition be,
 For intellect would make us proud
 And pride bring in impurity:
 The three old rascals laugh aloud. (274)

Despite moral diatribes, the plodding metre and last line reveal Yeats's contempt.

⁷¹ "He should have written [...] *A Malthusian Sheath* [...] but could not spell" (see fig. 6).

⁷² They had been removed from the investigation and had no access to Dublin Castle, where the depositions were written and stored.

⁷³ The Judge's summing up speech on the last day of the trial.

Yeats's withdrawal from the public began on the day after Lily's murder and lasted until the Monday after the accused were acquitted, from 10 June 1925 to 8 Monday, February 1926. Yeats had "heart trouble" but no medical intervention was noted. He gave his pre-planned Divorce Bill speech two days later.

In September 1925 he resumed management of the Abbey Theatre, but did not reappear in public until the first performance of *The Plough and the Stars* (1926) by Sean O'Casey. The playwright had recently added a new second Act involving a prostitute; unlike other characters from all levels of society, she was not a hypocrite. Joseph Holloway, a long-term supporter of the Abbey Theatre, wrote in his diary (O'Connor 1989, 195) about the furious riots during O'Casey's play: "A great big voice called 'O'Casey out!' on 'Rosie Redmond' appearing in Act II. Shouts of 'Honor Bright' were heard" (Holloway 1967, 255).

"Friday, February 12 A detective-lined theatre presented itself at the beginning of the play tonight at the Abbey and there was no disturbance [...] None was allowed to stand in the passages to make way for the 'G' men, a body of men of evil fame in Ireland" (*ibidem*).

The play and the public riot were directly concerned with Lily's murder, Yeats's abandonment of Kevin and his impoverishment of Mrs McGill. The decrepit house in the scenery closely resembled 2 Catherine Street according to my father. O'Casey was proclaiming distrust in the Free State while the audience⁷⁴ was protesting personally to Senator Yeats at Honor Bright's pointless death and his mendacious hypocrisy.

In 1961 W.H. Auden and Chester Kallman published an opera entitled *Elegy For Young Lovers* portraying "[...] the artist-genius of the nineteenth and early twentieth century". The theme was "[...] summed up in two lines by Yeats: The intellect of man is forced to choose / Perfection of the life or of the work" (1961, 62). Auden explains "[...] the artist-genius is morally bound [...] to exploit others whenever such exploitation will benefit his work, and to sacrifice them whenever their existence is a hindrance to his production. [...] Our hero [...] is a great poet. Throughout the opera he has been working on a poem; in order to complete it successfully, he [...] murders two people and breaks the spirit of a third. [...]" (63).

But Yeats did not murder Lily; he had attempted to protect her from threats of harm⁷⁵. His fault lay in not leaving George, which would have obviated her fierce anger and revenge. Although such a move would have been extremely controversial he would have kept his integrity, public respect and political support for "Unity of Being" (Maddox 1999a, 233).

⁷⁴ With representatives of Carlow-based Inghinidhe na hÉireann, including Mrs Sheehy and Kathleen Barry, according to Holloway.

⁷⁵ E.g. "The Death of the Hare".

Yeats finished writing "The Tower" on 7 October 1925, four months after Lily's murder, when his illegitimate son was four. His home in Galway was Ballylee Tower; to *Demon est Deus Inversus*⁷⁶ the Tower in the Tarot signifies collapse, disaster and ruin; the poet used both allusions. The poems in this series provide an autobiography between 1925 and 1927⁷⁷. George changed their chronological arrangement, names and other incriminating features.

Despite recent successes⁷⁸, Yeats suddenly feels acutely depressed and old. He talks of his body "this absurdity" and his "troubled heart"; saying that he "must bid the Muse go pack" because he cannot deal "in abstract things" and will "[...] be derided by / A sort of battered kettle at the heel" ("The Tower"). He is a laughing stock. The second stanza restates social "ruin" and crumbling "foundations" with the "[...] tree, like a sooty finger [...]" accusing him "under the day's declining beam"; he feels dirtied, blackened and responsible (240).

Yeats mentions Mrs French, whose servant carried out cruelty on her behalf without her permission, knowing she would condone it. Mrs French never complains or condemns it (241-243). Here Yeats reflects George, who indicated to O'Higgins that Lily and her son were expendable⁷⁹, although she did not commit the crime.

Yeats summons all the Tower's ghosts before deciding that only Hanrahan is necessary, "For I need all his mighty memories". Yeats says, "I myself created Hanrahan", a passionate schoolteacher blighted by a fairy queen who robs him of rest for eternity (243).

Both Yeats and Hanrahan are a "half-mad rhapsodic poet, a failed seducer of real women and a great curser of old age" chased by "hounds", a "man drowned in a bog's mire / When mocking Muses chose the country wench" (*ibidem*)⁸⁰.

Like Hanrahan, the "ancient bankrupt master of this house" has become "A lecher with a love on every wind" who has "reckoned up every unforeknown, unseeing / Plunge [...] / Into the labyrinth of another's being". Hanrahan knows about love affairs that Yeats needs advice for. His question is "Does the imagination dwell the most / On a woman won or a woman lost?" (*ibidem*).

⁷⁶ Yeats's alter ego as master of the occult in the *Golden Dawn* and *Stella Matutina*.

⁷⁷ Though poems from Kevin's birth in 1920 and his second reunion with his wife in 1923 are included.

⁷⁸ E.g. the Nobel Prize for Literature, honorary PhDs.

⁷⁹ Yeats identifies them by default in "A Prayer to My Son" by stating that threats to Lily and Kevin were made to him privately.

⁸⁰ George was a Londoner, while Maud and Iseult lived in Paris and Dublin; so he means Lily from County Carlow.

The date of "The Tower"⁸¹ indicates that the "woman lost" was Lily. "If on the last", continues Yeats, "admit you turned aside / From a great labyrinth out of pride, / Cowardice [...]", "And if that memory recur, the sun's / Under eclipse and the day's blotted out [...]". He blames himself for not entering Lily's "labyrinth", for not sharing his life with her (*ibidem*).

In "A Man Young and Old", his grief is expressed as contrite hindsight into what occurred. It is another series relating a history. "First Love", written on 25 May 1926, according to the given date, talks of a beautiful dead woman who "[...] blushed awhile [...]" and was as beautiful as "[...] the sailing moon [...]", "[...] In beauty's murderous brood [...]" meaning beauty had caused her downfall⁸². Yeats describes himself "[...] like a bit of stone [...]" Under a broken tree "[...]" longing to shout his grief aloud, "[...] but I am dumb / From human dignity" ("A Man Young and Old", poem III, "Human Dignity", 267-268).

"The yelling pack" in "The Death of the Hare" (poem IV, written in January 1926) are like the "polyyps" above. Lily is a vulnerable, hunted creature; the hunters find their quarry. He had alerted the hare / Lily to the pack and to the safety of the wood ("A Man Young and Old") – anonymity – but remembers "her distracted air" (269). Now he is "swept from there", out of contact with her, "set down standing in the wood", "At the death of the hare" (*ibidem*).

"The Empty Cup" (poem V, written in December 1926) talks of water, i.e. love or emotion, which kept him fresh and young until "his beating heart would burst". He found it "When all but dead of thirst" despite his marriage. Now he feels "moon-accursed" since "October last" ("A Man Young and Old")⁸³ because it is now "dry as bone", leaving him "crazed" (*ibidem*).

In the first verse of poem six, "His Memories" (poem VI, written in 1926), he refers to himself and George as public symbols, "holy shows", "[...] bodies broken like a thorn / Whereon the bleak north [wind] blows" (270). They are "buried Hector" of Greek mythology: once heroic, both are publicly reviled, dragged around the enemy's tomb on chariot wheels. Nevertheless their shame is private: "[...] none living knows" (poem VI). Lily, as Helen, "[...] the first of all the tribe lay there [...]" in his arms, before "She [...] brought great Hector down / And put all Troy to wreck [...]" (*ibidem*). In "His Wilderness", Yeats refers to himself as "Paris", an adulterer (273).

⁸¹ Most poems were written just after Lily's death in June 1925.

⁸² Written in 1926-1927, after the upheaval of Lily's murder and the trial. All poems in *The Tower* refer to his grief for Lily and Kevin, but this essay is too short to encompass all. Beauty, as Gogarty knew well, was the cause of rape, unwanted pregnancy and worse events in the life of a beautiful woman.

⁸³ George has altered the date; it may have originally been "summer past".

In poem VII, “The Friends of his Youth”, written on 2 July 1925, three weeks after Lily’s death, the “laughter” in the first four lines is not mirth but the uncontrolled humourless cachinnation of extreme grief. He “[...] gets a laughing fit”, “when the moon’s pot-bellied”, remembering Lily pregnant in extremity. In poem VII, Margaret McGill, a childless widow born 1878⁸⁴, was “[...] barren as a breaking wave [...]” (271). In this poem Yeats sees “[...] that old Madge⁸⁵ come down the lane, / A stone upon her breast, / And a cloak wrapped about the stone [...]” She “[...] thinks the stone’s a child [...]” and “Old Madge [...] can get no rest / with singing hush and hush-a-bye [...]” (*ibidem*)⁸⁶. Yeats refers to Chronos, the time Titan, who had many children but murdered them at birth, believing they would overthrow him later. When his wife Rhea pretended Zeus was a stone under her shawl Chronos laughed hysterically; but Zeus survived and superseded his father.

“Summer and Spring” (poem VIII, written in 1926) describes Yeats falling in love. The seasons are never mentioned, so the title refers to disparity in age⁸⁷. He says they “[...] knew we’d halved a soul / And fell the one in t’other’s arms / That we might make it whole [...]” (271)⁸⁸.

“The Secrets of the Old”⁸⁹ (poem IX, written in 1926 or 1927, probably the former), mentions Madge and Margery. George has again altered the names⁹⁰: “Madge” is Margaret McGill, and “Margery” is Madge Hopkins. Margaret, as his employee for five years, knew Yeats well⁹¹. Madge, Lily’s best friend, knew both Yeats and Margaret (“A Man Young and Old”). Yeats begins by saying he has “old women’s secrets now, / That had them of the young”; Lily, who had no other close family, must have treated the middle-aged foster-mother as ersatz mother, so Margaret spoke her mind to Yeats about “[...] what I dared not think / When my blood was strong [...]” (272), perhaps that extra-marital love can fade and children become superfluous. Margaret also had an accusing look for Madge, who may have contributed to Lily’s death by leading her to her assassin. Furthermore, when called to the witness box⁹² Madge had not given relevant evidence; what she endured in Dublin Castle during her interview was never broadcast, but her evidence

⁸⁴ Shown by her birth certificate.

⁸⁵ Yeats calls Margaret McGill “Madge” here, and the name fits the metre and intonation of the poem, so it seems original.

⁸⁶ She is looking after a small child, singing lullabies.

⁸⁷ Yeats was born in 1865 and Lily in 1900.

⁸⁸ Referring to the start of their affair.

⁸⁹ This poem proved to me beyond doubt that Yeats is my grandfather because here he names all adults and situations in Lily’s life.

⁹⁰ No one else had the opportunity to do so.

⁹¹ According to this poem: “We three [...]” (“The Secrets of the Old”).

⁹² At the trial of the alleged murderers.

was very curtailed⁹³. Hence “[...] Margery is stricken dumb / If thrown in Madge’s way [...]”. Yeats makes it clear that all three of them share a secret about a love affair between people of different social classes, “[...] the bed of straw [...]” and the “[...] bed of down”⁹⁴; “[...] We three make up a solitude: / For none alive today / Can know the stories that we know / Or say the things we say” (272).

“His Wildness” (poem X, written in 1926) reveals Yeats’s wish to die, to be reborn as “Paris”⁹⁵ in heaven alongside “Peg and Meg” (diminutives of Margaret and Madge), who “had so straight a back”, i.e. were honest and trustworthy, but who “Are gone away” or “have changed their silk to sack”. Margaret McGill’s income as foster mother ceased months after Lily’s death. Nothing is known of Madge (273).

My father remembered an unusual event⁹⁶. After being washed in a tin bath, his [foster] mother dressed him in brand-new clothes, including shoes and socks that he was not used to wearing. Then he and “his [foster] mother” walked to a big house and went into a high, imposing room full of men in “grand” clothes. A smiling man asked him questions. Then they went home, he changed his clothes and went to bed. My deduction, given my father’s infantile comprehension and the circumstances prevailing, is that Mrs McGill was summoned to bring four-year-old Kevin to a pre-trial interview. If asked to identify his mother he would have indicated Mrs McGill⁹⁷. Therefore Mrs McGill was re-classified as his mother; her wages were discontinued.

“From ‘Oedipus at Colonus’” (poem XI, written on 13 March 1927) is Yeats’s final poem in this series⁹⁸. He begins by articulating his intent: “Endure what life God gives and ask no longer span [...]”. As a “travel-wearied aged man” he desires no “delights”; they bring “death-longing”. In his experience pleasure and happiness, such as Oedipus experienced or he experienced with Lily, brings only “death, despair, division of families, all entanglements of mankind [...]”, well known to “[...] that old wandering beggar and these God-hated children [...]” i.e. George, Anne and Michael. The despairing poet

⁹³ The evidence she gave in court matched her witness deposition exactly: she did not say anything about Lily apart from what she had been told to say at Dublin Castle.

⁹⁴ An allusion to people from different classes of society, e.g. one rich, older and Protestant, one younger, poor and Catholic.

⁹⁵ Paris was the instigator of the Trojan War because he eloped with Helen, the most beautiful woman in the world. However “Paris” does not fit the metre, assonance or alliteration in this line. In my opinion Yeats wrote “Lily’s” rather than “Paris’s” love.

⁹⁶ My sisters and I remember him relating this. To have memory to recall this he must have been past babyhood. When Lily was murdered he was four years and seven months old.

⁹⁷ Cf. “A Prayer for My Son” (Yeats 1994 [1990], 258).

⁹⁸ Most of the poetry written by Yeats after June 1925 concerns Lily or Kevin; there is simply not enough space in this essay to reveal all. Those included here are the most obvious ones.

watches youth enjoying life whilst anticipating only “the silent kiss” of death. He might achieve the “second best” option of suicide: “[...] a gay goodnight and quickly turn away” (273).

In “A Dialogue of Self and Soul”, written in July-December 1927 (from Yeats’s next collection of poems, *The Winding Stair*), he contrasts “My Soul” or conscience with “My Self” or character. His soul summons him to “[...] the steep ascent [...]” towards the “[...] broken, crumbling battlement[...]” of “[...]the tower, / Emblematical of the night [...]”, for “Who can distinguish darkness from the soul?”. Only “[...] night [...] can [...] / Deliver from the crime of death and birth”. He accuses his Self of being confused about what “Is” done and what “Ought” to be done and admits to guilt, for “Only the dead can be forgiven” (285). However, Yeats’s Self holds up the sword with its embroidered scabbard of “heart’s purple” as a symbol of love and honour. He would “[...] claim as by a soldier’s right / A charter to commit the crime”⁹⁹ once more” (*ibidem*, Part I). He admits, “A living man is blind and drinks his drop. / What matter if the ditches are impure?”. He clarifies this in the third stanza, “[...] that most fecund ditch of all, / [...] if he woos / A proud woman not kindred of his soul”¹⁰⁰, referring to “The folly [...]” of having an affair with Lily (286, Part II).

In “At Algeciras – A Meditation upon Death”, written in November 1928 (also from *The Winding Stair*), he compares his life to nightfall: “Greater glory in the sun [...]” is fame and success, whilst “An evening chill upon the air [...]” is his later life. Both of these “Bid imagination run / Much on the Great Questioner; / What He can question, what if questioned I / Can with a fitting confidence reply” (296).

In “The Choice”, written in February 1931 or possibly earlier (also from *The Winding Stair*), he answers by saying “The intellect of man is forced to choose / Perfection of the life or of the work [...]”. He has chosen “[...] the day’s vanity [...]” leading to “[...] the night’s remorse” (297).

Recent new biographies of Yeats’s wife George have appeared. Since she read Yeats’s works, George knew from the outset about Lily because his poetry is explicit. George ruled his life (Saddlemeyer 2002, 321-322); she knew everyone that Yeats was associated with, including Kevin O’Higgins (318), with whom she regularly conversed in 1922-1925. Furthermore George belonged to every group or company that Yeats belonged to, including the Abbey Theatre, where she had charge of the wardrobe (362). Only George would know when Yeats visited Lily, so only she could follow him; if he was disguised by Abbey Theatre properties only she would recognise him and

⁹⁹ Having a child outside wedlock was a crime, cf. Rattigan 2012, 16.

¹⁰⁰ As previously stated, Yeats and Lily’s relationship opposed the cultural norms of religion, politics, age, wealth and morality.

have facilities to disguise herself. So George had every opportunity to discover Lily's address and give it to O'Higgins, and also every opportunity to convince O'Higgins that Lily was an espionage risk.

Moreover, George had good motives: rivalry, jealousy, fear of divorce, fear for her children's future, fear of loss of social position, property, inheritance and income.

Apart from opportunity and motives, is there evidence that she would do such a thing? Yeats provides it in "A Prayer for My Son"¹⁰¹: "[...] Some there are [...] Who have planned his murder [...]" because of "[...] a most haughty deed or thought / That waits upon his future days [...]" (258). Michael, the named son, was born on 22 August 1921 in Oxford, was less than a year when the poem was written and had never been to Dublin or under threat. However Yeats writes that his son was born in Dublin during the Civil War, as was Kevin. Yeats indicates concealed threats; those he spoke with privately were George and O'Higgins. In the last stanza Yeats speaks of Mary and Joseph journeying to Nazareth¹⁰²: "[...] when through all the town there ran / The servants of Your enemy" (258): Herod's soldiers were to kill a first-born son. The woman and the man whom he describes "Protecting till the danger past with human love" (*ibidem*) were Margaret Magill and her partner¹⁰³, fostering Kevin in the Liberties. Kevin and Michael both have two syllables with stress on the first, so George substituted one name for another and changed the date from 1920 to 1921; no one else had access before publication. Added to Yeats's allusion to Mrs French in "The Tower" and George's threats voiced as "The Frustrator", her guilt is clearly indicated. Her constant alterations to his poetry and hoarding of his works after his death provide further evidence of her culpability and manipulation.

Lily moved from Graignaspiddoge in 1918. "Robartes" and Lily met in a dance club in Dublin the same year, where Lily was earning her passage to America. Their ardent affair, which overrode divisions of religion, politics, age, social status and wealth, began in late 1918 or early 1919. In "A Man Young and Old" (267), Yeats admitted that he and Lily disagreed over politics, although she was not politically active. George edited his writing, knew about his affair from the start and systematically suppressed references to Lily and Kevin. George developed a plan of murder with Kevin O'Higgins, Vice-President and Minister of Justice and External Affairs, who was anxious to avoid political embarrassment and prevent the British reclaiming the Free

¹⁰¹ This poem from *The Tower* was supposedly written in December 1921.

¹⁰² A reference to Luke, II, 1-7.

¹⁰³ James White, whom my father regarded as "the kindest man in the whole world". Little is known about him except that he served in the British Army during World War I and died of sclerosis of the liver in 1929-1930 despite being teetotal.

State. George possessed motives to eliminate Lily and had many opportunities to persuade O'Higgins that she was a spy. On her behalf O'Higgins ordered his personal friend Leopold Dillon to interrogate and dispose of Lily.

When informed of her death Yeats was heart-broken, and finished his pre-planned Divorce Bill speech two days later, apologising for his sexual conduct. In his poetry of mourning Yeats indicates George's guilt, for example in "A Prayer for My Son", and "His Memories" in "The Tower". As a Senator, at O'Higgins request, he ensured the continuance of the Free State by concealing his adultery, protecting the Irish Free State government and its officials and suppressing their crimes, but became more involved with public education. By transforming Kevin into an anonymous impoverished orphan, Yeats warded off his murder. Hence his bitterness towards his wife and her children; thereafter, he treated her as a personal assistant and they were sent to a Swiss boarding school.

After the trial newspapers were silent. Fifty years later journalist Kevin O'Connor (1995) concocted articles by elderly ex-prostitutes claiming to have known Honor Bright. In 1995 John Finegan associated Honor Bright with the Monto, Dublin's red-light district. Both are unresearched, perfidious erotic fantasy¹⁰⁴.

Over ninety years later the Ministry of Justice and Garda Síochána are still refusing to open David Neligan's files on this case. Garda Detective Inspector Jodie Crowe insisted that I would "NEVER [*never*] be allowed any access to any of the documentation and artefacts pertaining to my grandmother's murder"¹⁰⁵, which suggests that they do exist. Yeats's descendants have never replied to requests for DNA samples to clarify paternity. A list of solicitors with experience of Irish criminal law has been requested from the Free Legal Advice Centre in Dublin.

Biographers seek the truth about conflict in Yeats's life, as does my family. Further research into the murder of Honor Bright would provide much-needed insight into disunity, suspicion and oppression within the history and politics of the Irish Free State.

Special thanks to all who came forward with relevant information including Frieda Palmer, Vera Durnell, Brian O'Neill, Mark O'Neill, Kevin O'Neill, Yvonne O'Neill, Shane O'Neill, Vincent O'Neill, Patrick McGee, John Reynolds, Gregory O'Connor, Kevin O'Connor, Ned Byrne, Graeme McKay, Annie Byrne, Breda MacDonald, Kevin Barry, Bridie Logan, Catherine Curl, Mike Powell, Tom Carew, Adrienne Roche, Terry Fagan, Grainne Blair, Pa-

¹⁰⁴ Terry Fagan, who grew up in the Monto and has become its historian, confirms she was never associated with that area.

¹⁰⁵ Interview at Novotel Hotel, Birmingham Airport in June 2010.

draig Yeates, John Smith, Johnny Golding, Heather Haslett, Martin Haslett, Jim Herlihy. Apologies to any that I've missed.

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