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“Unpurged of Unfulfilled Emotions”: The Concept of ‘Dreaming Back’ in W. B. Yeats’s *The Dreaming of the Bones* and *Purgatory*

In *A Vision*, Yeats divides the period between death and birth into two phases and six states. These two phases are the expiatory and the purified ones. The former includes the states of Dreaming Back and Return, Phantasmagoria and Shiftings, while the latter phase consists of the states of Beatitude, Purification and Foreknowledge. However, the journey from the state of ‘Dreaming Back’ to that of ‘Beatitude’ (a state of harmony, unity and knowledge) is only possible if one is purified of all emotion. In Yeats’s two plays, *The Dreaming of the Bones* (1919) and *Purgatory* (1939), the phenomenon of ‘dreaming back’ is supposed to be a severe act of purification of the sins committed by the dead, which should lead them to the state of ‘Beatitude’ at the end of the process. However, I argue that in these two plays ‘dreaming back’ proves to be an unfinished purgatorial process for the sins committed by the living (the protagonists of the plays: the Young Man in *The Dreaming of the Bones* and the Old Man in *Purgatory*). Even though ‘dreaming back’ seems to be the dreaming of the dead, it is, in fact, a projection of the vision taking place in the protagonists’ minds—this is the living’s own vision and dream in which the dead are merely secondary characters through whom the living could get a closer understanding of themselves. The process of ‘dreaming back’ is purifying, as it seems to be a journey to the protagonist characters’ second self (or anti-self, Daimon—a desired state of harmony and unity). This process is, however, unfinished, due to the fact that the living are stuck in their ordinary selves and they are incapable of achieving their tragic masks. I also claim that the fact that the process of ‘dreaming back’ is unfinished and seems to last for eternity without completion owes much to Yeats’s ideas on eugenics (the superiority of the Irish intellectual nobility over the merchant class) and the desired Unity of Being, and most

importantly, to Yeats's lost hopes concerning the recreation of an Ireland characterized by unity and governed by the Irish Protestant Ascendency.