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**“Unpurged of Unfulfilled Emotions”¹: The Concept of ‘Dreaming Back’ in
W. B. Yeats’s *The Dreaming of the Bones* and *Purgatory***

*I have heard in the night air
A wandering airy music;
And moldered in that snare
A man is lost of a sudden,
In that sweet wandering snare.
What finger first began
Music of a lost kingdom?
They dream that laughed in the sun.
Dry bones that dream are bitter.
They dream and darken our sun.
(The Dreaming of the Bones)*

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¹ Leonard E. Nathan, *The Tragic Drama of William Butler Yeats: Figures in a Dance*, New York and London: Columbia UP, 1965, p. 211.

1. Introduction

In the *oeuvre* and life of William Butler Yeats², dreams occupy a central position. Yeats referred to dreams in various ways, such as addressing the relationship between the luring of children to a dream-like world by the fairies (as in the poem “The Stolen Child”); he also used the term ‘dream’ in a deeper sense, meaning complex and almost prophetic visions; but his most renowned idea of dreams is the concept of Dreaming Back³. 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’ can be applied not only to the purification of the dead but primarily to that of the living; ‘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, Daimon⁴—a desired state of harmony and unity) through their gradual acquaintance with their pure and ordinary selves

² Yeats attributes a remarkable significance to dreams, and he firmly believes that “[w]e have nothing but dreams, and we have forgotten that seeing visions—a practice now relegated to the aberrant and uneducated—was once a more significant, interesting, and disciplined kind of dreaming.” (Yeats qtd. in Frank Tuhoy, *Yeats*, New York: Macmillan, 1976. p. 88.)

³ In what follows, I will refer to this concept with three different spellings: Dreaming Back (when referring to the state), ‘dreaming back’ (meaning the process) and dreaming back (used as a verb).

⁴ According to Yeats, man has two selves which, to some extent, are opposite selves, but at the same time they are also complementary and cannot exist without one another. However, Yeats believed that the second self (anti-self or Daimon) can only be achieved by exceptional men, mostly artists, such as Dante, Landor, Shelley or Yeats himself. If man reaches his Daimon, it means that he achieves a unified state of being and perfect harmony. It has to be noted that Yeats used the word ‘Daimon’ with two different spellings: ‘Daimon’ and ‘Daemon’. These two terms are interchangeable in Yeats’s terminology, both referring to a spirit (the anti-self) which connects a human to God.

(inferior to the desired second self). This process is, however, unfinished, due to the fact that the living are stuck in their ordinary selves. 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 eugenics⁵ and the desired Unity of Being, and most importantly, to Yeats’s lost hopes concerning the creation of an Ireland characterized by unity and governed by the Irish Protestant Ascendancy. Therefore, in what follows, I will consider the question of who is exactly dreaming back in these two plays, along with an examination of the sin committed by the living, and I will also elucidate the way the unfinished process of ‘dreaming back’ is connected to the concept of the Daimon and to Yeats ideas on the Irish aristocracy and the merchant class.

1.1. Dreaming Back and Beatitude

Before going into details of textual investigations, I feel it is necessary to briefly outline the plot of the two , and clarify certain Yeatsian expressions and concepts which are indispensable for understanding the message of the two plays.

In both plays, there is an either direct or indirect interaction between the souls of the dead and the living, and in both cases the living are somehow connected to the dead—there is an unfulfilled emotion between them which is to be settled, and hence the living are haunted by the ghosts, and have to contemplate or participate in the dreaming back of an event which has had relevance to all of them. *Purgatory* delineates the deterioration of an Irish family brought about by the marriage between the daughter of the house and a ‘drunken groom’. Some years later, their son—the Old Man of the play—stabbed his father with a knife in the burning house (set ablaze by the father), leaving him in the fire. From that moment on he took to the roads and became a pedlar. The destruction of the house and the subsequent murder of the father by his son constitute the background of the play which begins with the Old Man’s return to his ruined house haunted by his mother’s ghost. In this play the living (more precisely, the Old Man and his son) are only contemplating the ghosts’ ‘dreaming back’ (the Old Man witnesses the night of his conception), but there is no direct interaction between the dead and the living—the ghosts are not even mentioned in the *dramatis personae*. *The Dreaming of the Bones*, however, features a dialogue between the souls and the living

⁵ Yeats was firm in believing that the degeneration of modern Ireland was brought about by the increasing middle class (merchant class) which deprived the new Irish Protestant Ascendancy of its power and nobility inherited by the old Irish aristocracy of ancient kings (during their domination Ireland was characterized by unity and harmony).

character (the Young Man, that is, the young revolutionist), and the names of the ghosts are mentioned in the *dramatis personae* as well. The play is set after the 1916 Rising, and the Young Man is a rebel of the Easter Rising, fleeing from the police through Connemara to the Aran Islands. In his wanderings, he meets the ghosts of Diarmuid and Dervorgilla who, according to the legend, caused the degeneration of Ireland with their adulterous love, as Dervorgilla's husband called the enemy into Ireland out of vengeance seven hundred years ago. The core of the play is the ghosts pleading with the Young Man to forgive them for their historical betrayal of Ireland—the forgiveness, however, is refused. Another difference between the two plays is that in *Purgatory*, the living protagonist (the Old Man) deliberately wants to affect the dead, hence he stabs his son, believing he can thus put an end to his mother's purgatorial torments. In *The Dreaming of the Bones*, however, the living character (the Young Man) does not want to act in favour of the dead, what is more, he wants them to restart their 'dreaming back', and thus their purgatorial sufferings.

These two plays serve as the finest examples of Yeats's concept of the state of Dreaming Back. Michael McAteer mentions with regard to *Purgatory* that there is a kind of "mesmerising power paralysing characters, reducing them to somnambulism,"⁶ and McAteer also adds that this is valid for so many Yeatsian plays, and thus such mesmerising somnambulism affects the characters of *Bones* as well. As mentioned above, this state is only one of the six various states between death and birth, and these states are generally applied to the souls of the dead (though, we will see that this is not as evident as it appears at first). The aims of the state of Dreaming Back involve purification through the achievement of the state of Beatitude (that is, unity, and this is the beginning of the purifying phase) and the knowledge of both good and evil (knowing all) by getting rid of every single emotion—thus, reaching the Celestial Body (a unified state) by eliminating the Passionate Body (which includes emotions). As Yeats articulates in *A Vision*, "[i]f the *Passionate Body* does not disappear [meaning that the soul has not been purified of its feelings yet], the *Spirit* finds the *Celestial Body*, only after long and perhaps painful dreams of the past, and it is because of such dreams that the second state is sometimes called the *Dreaming Back*."⁷ According to Yeats, in the process of 'dreaming back', the Spirit "is compelled by the *Celestial Body* to trace every passionate event to its cause until all are related and understood, turned into knowledge, made part of itself."⁸ Most importantly, 'dreaming back' has to be complete in

⁶ Michael McAteer, *Yeats and European Drama*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010, p. 186.

⁷ William Butler Yeats, *A Vision*, New York: Macmillan, 1961, pp. 224-5.

⁸ Yeats, *A Vision*, p. 226.

order for the souls to have a fortunate next incarnation later on⁹. However, in these two plays, the process of ‘dreaming back’ cannot come to completion and conclusion; rather, the process seems to restart from time to time for eternity, which foretells that it is anything but evident that it is only the souls of the dead who are dreaming, and it also suggests that it is not the souls who play the major part in this purgatorial process.

⁹ Cf. Yeats, *A Vision*, p. 227.

2. Dreaming in the Dreaming

The process of ‘dreaming back’ is usually referred to with regard to the souls of the dead, and indeed, Yeats mostly uses the terms ‘dead’ and ‘soul’ when explaining the meaning and the characteristics of this state. However, in *A Vision*, we can find several allusions to the fact that the subjects of this kind of dreaming might be the souls of the living as well. For example, when Yeats mentions Paul Valéry’s poem “Cimiterie Marin,” he emphasises in relation to his own ideas on the souls’ fate that “[t]he worm devours not only the dead, but as self-love, self-hate, or whatever one calls it, devours the living also.”¹⁰ What is more, Yeats adds that the dead can “tap the minds of the living,”¹¹ and “[i]t is from the *Dreaming Back* of the dead [...] that we get the imagery of ordinary sleep.”¹² And another important idea of Yeats is that “the living can assist the imaginations of the dead.”¹³ It appears, however, that what is at stake in the two plays is not the living contemplating the imagination of the dead, but the living contemplating their own imagination, their own vision or dream in which the souls of the dead are only secondary characters—they face the ‘dreaming back’ of the dead in their own dream due to the fact that they nurture unfulfilled emotions towards the souls of the dead. Thus, ‘dreaming back’ is a purgatorial process for a sin committed by the living protagonists (the Young Man and the Old Man), and their sin proves to be their incapability of purifying themselves of anger towards the dead.

More precisely, it appears that the two plays possess a Chinese box structure as regards the process of dreaming. Helen Vendler also makes reference to the fact that it is not only the dead (the bones) who are dreaming back in *The Dreaming of the Bones*. She argues that “like the ghosts of Dermot [Diarmuid] and Dervorgilla in the play, the Young Man is also dreaming back.”¹⁴ At the beginning of *The Dreaming of the Bones*, the First Musician asks: “Have not old writers said / That dizzy dreams can spring / From the dry bones of the dead?”¹⁵ This means that there is, in fact, a dreaming in the dreaming phenomenon, as in both cases the ‘dreaming back’ of the dead brings about the dreaming of the living who, then, become part of the ‘dreaming back’ process and re-live a crucial event in their lives—an event which strongly connects them to the dead. In *The Dreaming of the Bones*, this event is a

¹⁰ Yeats, *A Vision*, p. 221.

¹¹ Yeats, *A Vision*, p. 228.

¹² Yeats, *A Vision*, p. 229.

¹³ Yeats, *A Vision*, p. 221.

¹⁴ Helen Vendler qtd. in McAteer, p. 136.

¹⁵ William Butler Yeats, *The Collected Plays of W. B. Yeats*, New York: Macmillan, 1968. p. 276.

question which has concerned Ireland and the Irish since the betrayal of Diarmuid and Dervorgilla, that is, the question whether the Irish should or should not forgive the traitors; while in *Purgatory*, the crucial event is the conception of the Old Man by the sexual union of his noble mother and her drunken groom of middle class origins (which the Old Man considered as a pollution to the aristocratic blood).

As mentioned above, there is something that connects the living to the dead and which, thus, makes the 'dreaming back' incomplete, and which also implies that the souls of the dead are not meant to be protagonists but they are rather mediums for the living to achieve a purified state of being. In *Bones*, there are hidden allusions to the presence of an unfulfilled emotion between the dead and the living. For instance, the Young Man recounts that he has heard "that there are souls / Who, having sinned after a monstrous fashion, / Take on them, being dead, a monstrous image / To drive the living, should they meet its face, / Crazy, and be terror to the dead."¹⁶ What is more, in another passage, the Stranger (the ghost of Diarmuid) says to the Young Man that "[he] will put [the Young Man] safe, / No living man shall set his eyes upon [him]; / [he] will not answer for the dead."¹⁷ These passages refer to the fact that there exists something unfulfilled between the souls of the dead and the living which is to be arranged, otherwise Dreaming Back remains incomplete and the torment restarts again and again for eternity.

What is more, the process of 'dreaming back' seems to remain incomplete as a result of a sin committed by the living characters instead of the ones committed by the dead. The sin of the dead and the reason for their own 'dreaming back' is evident from the plays: in *Purgatory*, the father ruined and burnt down the ancestral house, once attended by noblemen, and he also polluted the mother with his blood; in *Bones*, the adulterous couple is accused of being the major cause of the degeneration of Ireland, as Dervorgilla's husband "brought / A foreign army from across the sea"¹⁸ to take revenge for their adultery. Thus, in the first case there is violence against property, while in *Bones*, the couple is guilty of adultery and treachery. However, the major transgression of the living and the reason for their unfinished purgatorial process is not a concrete sin, that is, their sin is not unlawful and punitive by the law; rather, what they do is disdainful and punitive within Yeats's own system. Even though in *Purgatory* the Old Man commits homicide twice which is a more grievous transgression than his father's, the protagonists' 'dreaming back' in both plays appears to be brought about

¹⁶ Yeats, *Collected Plays*, p. 281.

¹⁷ Yeats, *Collected Plays*, p. 278.

¹⁸ Yeats, *Collected Plays*, p. 282.

by another act. This act is their disdain and anger towards the souls of the dead—this is what triggers the protagonists' own painful and purgatorial dreaming process.

The state which is geared to “exhaust, not nature, not pain and pleasure, but emotion”¹⁹ is the state of Phantasmagoria. However, in these two plays both the dead, but more importantly, the living are stuck in the state of Dreaming Back. Yeats explains that “[i]f a *Spirit* cannot escape from its *Dreaming Back* to complete its expiation, new life may come soon and be, as it were, a part of its *Dreaming Back* and so repeat the incidents of the past life.”²⁰ Here, both the dead and the living are stuck in their Dreaming Back, but striking here is the fact that everything depends on the living—the outcome of this process is in their hands, as if they could forgive, the Dreaming Back came to a conclusion and both the souls of the dead and their own souls would be released and blessed by the pious act of forgiveness.

However, there are textual references to the fact that the souls of the dead are already blessed or that they know all, which suggests that they are closer to the phase of purification or they are already purified, and already reached a unified state purified of all emotion, unlike the souls of the living who are still bound by their destructive emotions. For example, in *Purgatory* the Old Man says in relation to the dead that “there are some / That do not care what’s gone, what’s left: / The souls in Purgatory that come back / To habitations and familiar spots.”²¹ It follows that the souls do not care anymore; they got rid of all emotion as opposed to the Old Man who still feels anger towards both his mother and father. The Old Man does not realise that it is he who is the subject of the purification and the punishment instead of his mother; it is he who has to save himself instead of trying to affect the fate of his mother’s soul. The Old Man believes that it is his father who committed an unforgiveable transgression which deserves punishment and from which he wants to rescue his mother. In fact, it is he who is just committing something which will have irreversible consequences; he should eliminate himself or his anger instead of his son in order to put an end to the pollution and to this whole torturous purgatorial process. At the end of the play, it seems as if he realised his role in the ‘dreaming back’, as he begins to pray to God both for his and his mother’s soul: “...Appease / The misery of the living and the remorse of the dead.”²² In fact, this final prayer expresses only his coming to the realisation of the impossibility to affect the fate of the dead, but he does not apprehend that it is he who ought to change by eventually forgiving his father

¹⁹ Yeats, *A Vision*, p. 230.

²⁰ Yeats, *A Vision*, p. 236.

²¹ Yeats, *Collected Plays*, p. 431.

²² Yeats, *Collected Plays*, p. 436.

for the sins of the past. This follows that 'dreaming back' is an act of punishment and a chance to purification for the living and not for the dead.

The importance of the living in the process of 'dreaming back' is highlighted by the concept of knowledge as well. According to Yeats, in *Shiftings* "the *Spirit* is purified of good and evil. In so far as the man did good without knowing evil, or evil without knowing good, his nature is reserved until that knowledge is obtained."²³ Knowing good and evil is an attribute of the blessed and unified state, and after *Shiftings* the next state, Marriage or Beatitude, refers to a union with God which is supposed to result in reincarnation into the world. However, it appears that in these two plays the souls are more capable of this Marriage than the souls of the living who, in contrary, seem to be stuck in the first Yeatsian phase. In *Purgatory*, the Old Man declares that "[s]he [his mother] never knew the worst, because / She died in giving birth to [him], / But now she knows it all, being dead."²⁴ In *Bones*, the blessedness and knowledge of the souls of the dead are more controversial, as in this play it is emphasised that the souls would at once become blessed if the living character forgave them: "Their manner of life were blessed could their lips / A moment meet; [...]"²⁵. Yeats, however, in *A Vision* refers to the dead with the adjective 'blessed'²⁶. Thus, even though in *Bones* we cannot claim with as much certainty that the dead are blessed as in *Purgatory*, we can still argue that even in *Bones* they are closer to the blessed state than the soul of the Young Man who cannot think of anything else but the unforgivable nature of the couple's sin and his anger. Peter Ure explains that "there are things the old man 'knows' and does not *know*, and what he does not *know*, or does not fully understand, is an important element in his tragedy."²⁷

Still, another argument which subscribes to the idea that it is the living who are the protagonists of the 'dreaming back' is the fact that this process or the state of Dreaming Back is of considerable importance in Yeats's philosophy. Such a remarkable and relevant phenomenon is supposed to be attributed to important characters. However, in *Purgatory* the ghosts are not even mentioned in the *dramatis personae*, and in *Bones* it is emphasised that, according to Irish mythology, only those who were born at midnight can see and talk to the dead, but the Young Man declares that he does not belong to them.²⁸ This statement calls attention to the relevance of the Young Man compared to the ghosts; he was not born at

²³ Yeats, *A Vision*, p. 231.

²⁴ Yeats, *Collected Plays*, p. 431.

²⁵ Yeats, *Collected Plays*, p. 282.

²⁶ Cf. Yeats, *A Vision*, p. 223.

²⁷ Peter Ure qtd. in. William Butler Yeats, *Purgatory: Manuscript Materials*, ed. Sandra Siegel, Cornell University Press, 1986. p. 12

²⁸ Yeats, *Collected Plays*, p. 278.

midnight, yet he is continuously conversing with the dead without being aware of it. The subjects of ‘dreaming back’, therefore, cannot be the secondary characters. What is more, Nathan also refers to the fact that it is not only the dead who are dreaming when he differentiates between “night’s spirits and day’s dreamers who do not know they dream”²⁹. Thus, the difference between the dead and the living seems to be the awareness of dreaming: in both plays, the dead know all, and thus know that they are dreaming back, while the living think that it is the only the dead who are dreaming, failing to realise that it is their own vision—a ‘dreaming back’ in which the dreaming back of the dead is only secondary and exemplary.

Interestingly, in *A Vision* Yeats makes reference to certain Upanishads and their concept according to which there are, in fact, “three states of the soul, that of waking, that of dreaming, that of dreamless sleep, and [they] say man passes from waking through dreamless sleep every night and when he dies.”³⁰ This is not by accident that Yeats mentions this idea in the middle of his explanation of his own concept of ‘dreaming back’. The above passage suggests that the various states both in the Upanishads and Yeats’s system can be applied not only to the souls of the dead but to the living as well; the passage clearly states that these states can be lived through both after death (for the dead) and in dreamless sleep (for the living). In *Bones* and *Purgatory* the reader encounters both due to the dreaming in the dreaming structure. Both the dead and the living are heading towards the state of dreamless state which, as Yeats puts it, is “a state of pure light, or of utter darkness according to our liking, and in dream ‘the spirit serves as light for itself.’”³¹ Thus, the state of dreamless sleep proposed by the Upanishads is mentioned by Yeats because it bears strong resemblance to the state of Beatitude proposed by his own system. Moreover, Yeats also mentions The Mandookya Upanishad according to which there is a fourth state as well, that is to say, a state “which is reached not in dreamless sleep but in contemplation and in wakefulness.”³² Taking a closer look at *Bones* and *Purgatory*, it can be argued that in the former one the living character (the Young Man) is supposed to reach the third state, that is, dreamless sleep in order to be purified and united with the blessed dead through forgiveness. In the latter one, however, the Old Man is approaching to a state similar to the fourth state of the Upanishads, that is, a kind of contemplation, because the whole play elaborates on an act of contemplation of the dead by the living. Due to the fact that the Old Man does not realise that what he is

²⁹ Nathan, p. 212.

³⁰ Yeats, *A Vision*, p. 220.

³¹ Yeats, *A Vision*, p. 220.

³² Yeats, *A Vision*, p. 222.

contemplating is his own imagination, and as a result of which he commits another crime, and fails to forgive, the state of pure light remains unavailable for the living.

3. The Daimon as the Aim of Dreaming Back

Bound up with the living characters' inability to purge themselves of all emotion, there is another factor which prevents the living from completing the dreaming process and achieving the state of Beatitude (a state of complete equilibrium), and as a result of which 'dreaming back' remains unfinished. In both plays, the living protagonists are fragmented beings, and their 'dreaming back' is supposed to be a journey to their own second selves (Daimon) through the gradual acquaintance with their ordinary selves.³³ However, it turns out that their incapacity of eliminating their anger towards the dead stems from the fact that the living are stuck in their ordinary selves, and the completion of their anti-selves is inconceivable in these two plays, all of which leads to horror and degeneration.

In order to understand why 'dreaming back' remains incomplete and why the souls of the living are stuck in the state of Dreaming Back and thus in their ordinary selves, it is necessary to bear in mind Yeats's concept of objectivity and subjectivity. Yeats's plays can be classified into three groups: as Nathan explains it, there are those "in which the subjective nature is at the center of dramatic interest,"³⁴ those "in which the objective nature is the center of dramatic attention,"³⁵ and those which combine both objective and subjective features. Nathan continues that subjective plays result in heroic transcendence and tragic ecstasy, while objective plays present a failure of heroic transcendence, ending up in horror³⁶. *The Dreaming of the Bones* and *Purgatory* are set in a clearly objective context, that is, they lack heroic transcendence and ecstasy, feature a sense of degeneration and present the impossibility of the living characters' achievement of their Daimon where unity and equilibrium would be available. As Nathan articulates it,

if the conflict occurs in an objective context, in a phase of history or personality dominated by the qualities associated with objectivity, then tragic heroism and completion of being are impossible; in the objective phases heroism and completion are replaced, at best, by a desolating awareness of the loss of freedom to choose, and, by implication, a sense of the lost opportunity for completion of the self or for perfect harmony and ecstatic beauty.³⁷

³³ As mentioned above, one of the purposes of Dreaming Back is to achieve knowledge, and knowledge implies the knowledge of the self as well, thus elevating themselves to a higher state of being, that is, the Daimon.

³⁴ Nathan, p. 191.

³⁵ Nathan, p. 191.

³⁶ Cf. Nathan, p. 191.

³⁷ Nathan, p. 191.

A sense of the lost chance to achieve the completion of the anti-self and perfect harmony lurks behind the lines of the ending of both plays, but most strikingly in *Purgatory* where the father seems to understand, at least partly, that he failed to act in the right way. He appears to partly comprehend his role in the dream, but his is only a half-knowledge, and hence the horror and his tragedy. Nathan points out that the same situation occurs in *Bones* as well: “The theme of *The Dreaming of the Bones* [...] is the protagonist’s refusal or incapacity to assume the tragic mask [Daimon]. The result of such a refusal is horror, a horror that returns the spirit lovers to their terrible fate and leaves the young Revolutionist unchanged, full of cruel bitterness that is his fruitless answer to a seven hundred-year-old cruel bitterness.”³⁸ Striking in this passage is the reference to the Young Man’s unchanged personality and his fruitless answer, as these two references suggest that, on the one hand, the Young Man was supposed to change his attitude towards the dead, that is, he should have forgiven them, and his response was fruitless because it should not have been a refusal. His answer proves to be fruitless because he did not forgive, and thus he prevented both the dead and himself from reaching the highest sphere of being, that is to say, the state of their second selves or Daimon where perfect harmony could have been available for them. Even though Nathan applies the phrase “unpurged of unfulfilled emotions”³⁹ to the souls of the dead, I claim that it is mainly the living who remain unpurged of their emotions, they are full of bitterness due to their anger, and thus their beings remain incomplete as well. Hence ‘dreaming back’ restarts and they will be haunted by the spirits of the dead in their dreams for eternity.

Also, there is another explanation of objectivity and subjectivity which provides new and increasingly interesting readings of *Bones* and *Purgatory*. In Yeats’s philosophy, it is the cones or gyres which serve to embody the extremes of objectivity and subjectivity. The gyres represent the continuous and repetitive interchange of history which means that every single 2000-year-long cycle ends with a cataclysm followed by the revelation of the next cycle. The fact that the two plays are set in an objective age means that they present an age close to the end of the cycle, that is to say, horror and apocalypse. Richard Ellmann explains, however, that “[t]he cones were not restricted to symbolizing objectivity and subjectivity; they were also [...] beauty and truth, value and fact [...], quality and quantity [...], Man and Daimon, the living and the dead.”⁴⁰ What is more, according to Ellmann, objectivity characterises an age

³⁸ Nathan, p. 211.

³⁹ Nathan, p. 211.

⁴⁰ Richard Ellmann, *Yeats: The Man and the Masks*, London: Faber and Faber, 1961, p. 231.

“when every man tries to look like his neighbour and repress individuality and personality”⁴¹; when men endeavour in vain to escape from their personality. In contrast, a subjective age presents “great personalities [...] realizing themselves to the utmost.”⁴² From all these passages it follows that objectivity is associated with Man (the ordinary self) and the living characters’ stuck state, while subjectivity is connected to the second self, the Daimon and also to the dead who, in these two plays, are closer to the state of unity than the living. Both in *Bones* and *Purgatory*, it is the living who are in the center of attention, and thus in the center of the dreaming process, hence the plays’ overwhelming and “degenerate objectivity”⁴³ which brings about a sense of an imminent tragedy, horror or apocalypse—the ending of a 2000-year-long cycle.

The reason for the living characters’ tragedy lies, therefore, in their fragmented personalities. In *The Dreaming of the Bones*, the Young Man’s ordinary self is the one which cannot realise that it is he who counts in the process of ‘dreaming back,’ the one which rejects forgiveness and thus remains incapable of achieving his tragic mask, the Daimon. Whereas the more refined and harmonious part of his ordinary self, that is, his second self is the one which seems to be willing to forgive the adulterous couple (even if only for a moment). After refusing forgiveness three times, and the ‘dreaming back’ restarts, the Young Man declares: “I had almost yielded and forgiven it all— / Terrible the temptation and the place!”⁴⁴. This statement suggests Yeats’ idea that self and its Daimon, though being opposite poles, are complementary and integrated to one another. The self contains its anti-self as well, but there are only few and exceptional people whose self can bring its second-self to manifestation. In *Bones*, the Young Man’s self cannot reach completion, that is to say, it is unable to create its Daimon. Also, it must be noted that in *Bones* all characters are masked (the three Musicians and the ghost of Diarmuid and Dervorgilla) except for the Young Man, which evokes the above mentioned idea according to which the dead are on the way of achieving beatitude and unity, unlike the living character who keeps on suffering from his fragmented personality, and thus cannot achieve his mask and through the mask, a total equilibrium.

In a similar vein, the Old Man’s personality in *Purgatory* is split between his objective self and his hidden, subjective Daimon. Nathan explains that “[a]s befitting a play set in the objective phases of a dying cycle in which men become reduced to fragmented beings no

⁴¹ Ellmann, p. 231.

⁴² Ellmann, p. 232.

⁴³ Nathan, p. 192.

⁴⁴ Yeats, *Collected Plays*, p. 284.

character is masked and there is no ecstatic dance”⁴⁵. Here the Old Man’s self proves to be his degenerate self destitute of noble blood (as a result of his aristocratic mother’s marriage with his low-class father); his self is also the one which does not realise that it is he who should carry out repentance, and it is he who ought to change in order to halt Dreaming Back; and the one unable to interfere with the fate of the dead. Similar to *Bones*, the second-self of the Old Man manifests itself in certain lines, though it remains unachieved. The Old Man’s Daimon lies in the aristocratic part of his personality⁴⁶; it is the one which perceives that he cannot affect the dead. There is a point where the Old Man seems to be aware of the fact that the living cannot affect the dead, and he cries: “Deaf! Both deaf! If I should throw / A stick or a stone they would not hear; / And that’s a proof my wits are out.”⁴⁷ This statement implies that he perceives that the dead do not react, but he believes that this is because he went mad. It seems as if he were not willing to resign to the fact that he (the living) can do nothing to save the souls of the dead, because he ought to concentrate on his own personality and fate.

The Old Man’s fragmented self is equally manifested in the variation of the rough and colloquial style and the erudite and refined one. Nathan points out that “[t]he mixed nature of the Old Man, a compound of the base inheritance from his father and the aristocratic inheritance from his mother, is embodied in his speech.”⁴⁸ The Old Man’s style is mainly harsh, direct and reflects brutality, especially when speaking about his father, his own conception, and the origins of his father. For instance, when he tries to prevent his mother from starting a sexual intercourse with the father, he cries: “Do not let him touch you! It is not true / That drunken men cannot beget, / And if he touch he must beget / And you must bear his murderer.”⁴⁹ However, after stabbing his own son, and believing that he has saved his mother’s soul, his erudite self appears for a moment: “’Hush-a-bye baby, thy father’s a knight, / Thy mother a lady, lovely and bright.’ / No, that is something that I read in a book, / And if I sing it must be to my mother / And I lack rhyme.”⁵⁰ As Nathan puts it, “[t]he Old Man’s brutalized fineness is the only direct expression in the play of the lineal aristocratic superiority thrown away by his mother.”⁵¹ Therefore, this seemingly inconsistent style of the Old Man reveals the reason for the unfinished ‘dreaming back’ and purification, that is to say, it points

⁴⁵ Nathan, p. 240.

⁴⁶ According to Yeats, members of the old and the new Irish aristocracy are more capable of achieving the Daimon than anybody else, especially if they are artist-aristocrats as well.

⁴⁷ Yeats, *Collected Plays*, p. 434.

⁴⁸ Nathan, p. 242.

⁴⁹ Yeats, *Collected Plays*, pp. 433-4.

⁵⁰ Yeats, *Collected Plays*, p. 435.

⁵¹ Nathan, p. 243.

at his two opposing personalities. These personalities, however, cannot find harmony, because of the Old Man's incapability of forgiveness which could lead him to his Daimon.

The foregoing examples have presented that the aim of the expiatory phase of Yeats's system is the living characters' achievement of their Daimon. In *A Vision*, Yeats articulates that "[t]he expiation, because offered to the living for the dead, is called 'expiation for the dead' but it is in reality expiation for the *Daimon* which seeks by union with some other *Daimon* to reconstruct above the antinomies its own true nature."⁵² This passage is outstandingly important, as with this, Yeats declares that the purpose of the living is to expiate for the dead. However, in order to expiate for the dead, they should first forgive them, as nobody can expiate for someone whom they do not forgive. What is more, if the living were able to forgive them, they would achieve their true nature, thus reaching their Daimon—the expiation for the dead, however, is impossible (in *Bones*) or interrupted (in *Purgatory*) either because the living protagonist presents a wilful refusal to act in favour of the dead (like the Young Man), or because the living character begins the expiation for the dead still full of negative emotions and bitterness (like the Old Man).

What is more, in both plays it is the souls of the dead who induce the living to aspire to perfection and achieve their Daimon. In *A Vision*, Yeats explains that "*Purification* may require the completion of some syntheses left unfinished in its past life [for instance, the anger towards the dead]. [And the dead may] compel us to attend to that perfection which, though it seems theirs, is the work of our *Daimon*."⁵³ In *Purgatory*, there is no direct communication between the ghosts and the living, but the Old Man is induced by the ghosts indirectly to take notice of the aim of the 'dreaming back'. The Old Man should perceive in time that whatever he does, he cannot influence the living, and this is symbolized by the hoof beats. Nor at the end of the play does he realise that his attempt to save his mother has been in vain due to the fact that he is the protagonist of the 'dreaming back,' but instead, the Old Man believes that mankind can do no more and hence he prays to God, still unaware of his role in the dreaming process. In *Bones*, however, the ghosts are literally and directly trying to persuade the Young Man to forgive them. What is more, in this play the ghosts are leading the Young Man up to a mountain (which evokes the mountain of Purgatory) where the tombs of the dead, including those of the adulterous couple along with the ancient ruin of an Abbey, can be found. It is striking that the ghosts become leaders for the living character, and it is only near the top of the mountain that they ask for his forgiveness. The mountain, therefore, proves to be symbolic

⁵² Yeats, *A Vision*, p. 238.

⁵³ Yeats, *A Vision*, p. 234.

of purification, unity and the living character's gradual acquaintance with his self which should lead him to his Daimon if he forgave the lovers at the top of the mountain. The process of the achievement of unity begins with the symbolic dance and sexual union of the lovers, but remains unfinished, as they cannot kiss each other due to the Young Man's cruel and assertive refusal. Thus, in *Bones*, it seems to be much more evident that the living are supposed to learn from the example of the dead, and that the dead serve as agents or mediators for the living characters' achievement of their Daimon. Yet, as Nathan concludes, "man cannot reach his opposing daemon"⁵⁴ in either of the two objective plays.

⁵⁴ Nathan, p. 248.

4. Ideas on Eugenics and Unity

In a passage in “The Trembling of the Veil” Yeats proposes the idea that three types of men have made all beautiful things in the world: aristocrats, countrymen and artists:

[a]ristocracies have made beautiful manners, because their place in the world puts them above the fear of life, and the countrymen have made beautiful stories and beliefs, because they have nothing to lose and so do not fear, and the artists have made all the rest, because Providence has filled them with recklessness.⁵⁵

Even though Yeats on one side descended from an old aristocratic family, the Butlers, while on the other side, from merchants, the Middletons and Pollexfens⁵⁶ he does not mention here the middle class, only the aristocracy (the Anglo-Irish landowners of the Protestant Ascendancy) and the peasantry (a class of Celtic countrymen, once pagan, now Catholic). This is because, as Donald J. Childs explains, “Yeats disregarded the middle class [...], celebrating instead aristocrats and peasants—members of better-born classes whose virtues he combined and expressed in his role as a poet.”⁵⁷ Yeats’s ideas on eugenics with regard to Ireland’s fate are strikingly important, as the fact that ‘dreaming back,’ and thus the whole purgatorial process is incomplete in *The Dreaming of the Bones* and *Purgatory* owes much to Yeats’s ideas on the degeneration of the Protestant Irish Aristocracy (an intellectual nobility), the increasing merchant class and the unsuccessfulness of recreating the Unity of Being in Ireland.⁵⁸ George Boyce rightly points out that these two plays display “the final collapse of [...] the Protestant Irish nation and its sense of cultural distinctiveness.”⁵⁹ This collapse is manifested most markedly in the living characters’ personality and origins which demonstrate the “thesis of Anglo-Irish decline”⁶⁰.

Nathan explains that both plays “take for their subject modern Ireland and they represent Yeats’s efforts to deal with his own time.”⁶¹ For Yeats, the major problem of the Ireland of his time was undoubtedly the fate of the Irish Ascendancy as a result of the growing merchant class that Yeats considered to be pollution to the nobility. In *Purgatory*, this idea of the pollution of the aristocracy by the merchant class is manifested in the Old Man’s family,

⁵⁵ Yeats qtd. in Arnold Stein, “Yeats: A Study in Recklessness,” in: *The Sewanee Review*, 57. 4., 1949 (Autumn), p. 607.

⁵⁶ Cf. Foster qtd. in Donald J. Childs, “Class and eugenics,” in: *W. B. Yeats in Context*, ed. David Holdeman and Ben Levitas, New York: Cambridge UP, 2010, p.169.

⁵⁷ Childs, p. 169.

⁵⁸ The desired Unity of Being is represented in the plays by the characters’ aspiration towards Beatitude

⁵⁹ George Boyce qtd. in McAteer, p. 141.

⁶⁰ McAteer, p. 184.

⁶¹ Nathan, p. 209.

and this pollution is the main reason for the Old Man's anger and his incapacity to forgive his father.

In *Purgatory*, the ideal Irish Protestant nobility is embodied by the Old Man's mother and the ancient house the family used to live in. As Brenda S. Webster articulates, "[t]he Old Man is identified with the Great House⁶² through an aristocratic Anglo-Irish mother. Yeats's lines describing the house recall earlier poems written to extol the virtues of the Great Houses"⁶³. Webster adds that those lines evoke "Yeats's nostalgia for Coole⁶⁴ and Lady Gregory."⁶⁵ Even though Webster mentions that the mother incorporates Lady Gregory in the sense that she reminds Yeats of his idealized mother, it is also true that in *Purgatory* the mother resembles the figure of Lady Gregory because the mother is an unmistakable Ascendancy Lady who became the victim of a drunken man of low class origin. The mother thus becomes the emblem of the intellectual nobility and the Unity of Being as well, since, as Yeats puts it in the play, now she 'knows all,' which means that she already achieved a state of unified being and became blessed.

However, the mother has committed a grievous sin in the eyes of the Old Man for which reason the Old Man is angry with the mother as well. Yeats believed that the biggest danger for Ireland was the passive reaction of the aristocracy to the growing power of the merchant class. It is this passivity that proves to be the mother's most grievous sin. When the Old Man sees his father approaching the house, he declares: "She has gone down to open the door. / This night she is no better than her man / And does not mind that he is half drunk, / She is mad about him."⁶⁶ What is significant is the phrase she "does not mind": in *Purgatory* the mother proves to be indifferent, she does not mind that night and her indifference had a serious consequence. This consequence was the birth of the Old Man, already polluted by his father's blood, with half-knowledge and half-education, lacking the unmistakable nobility of his mother. The mother's indifference is the reason why the Old Man cannot cease to feel anger toward her and her groom. The Old Man does his utmost to save the mother only because she is an Ascendancy Lady, but it seems that the Old Man detests his mother for her indifference in the same way as he condemns his father. For instance, the Old Man mentions that his grandmother despised his mother for marrying the drunken stableman, and the Old

⁶² The term "Great House" signifies the ancient Irish aristocracy which dominated Ireland when the country was characterised by unity of culture and its people by Unity of Being.

⁶³ Brenda S. Webster, *Yeats: A Psychoanalytic Study*, Stanford: Stanford UP, 1973, p. 159.

⁶⁴ Coole Park was, for Yeats, the place of perfect harmony where artists and intellectual aristocrats could gather just like the humanist cycles in Renaissance Italy (which Yeats regarded as the model for the Unity of Culture).

⁶⁵ Webster, p. 160.

⁶⁶ Yeats, *Collected Plays*, p. 433.

Man asserts that she was right in doing so: “Her mother never spoke to her again, / And she did right.”⁶⁷ Therefore, in *Purgatory*, though the mother proves to be the representative of the ideal Irish aristocracy who became victim of the increasing power of the degenerate merchant class, she was also responsible for her and her son’s fate due to her indifference. In this respect, the mother is rightfully condemned by the Old Man, because, as Childs puts it, she forgot her “eugenical duty to anti-modern Irishness”⁶⁸ by allowing a stableman to pollute her noble blood, and this is why “Yeats condemns the absence of [the] aristocratic biological genius”⁶⁹ is this play.

If the mother’s sin is worthy of condemnation in the eyes of the Old Man, then, the father’s deed is a capital offence, as he caused the destruction of the ancient house, the mother and thus the following generations as well. The description of the house and its present condition nicely demonstrates the ancestral degeneration brought about by the father. At the beginning of the play, the Old Man calls the attention to the house at once which foreshadows its significance: “Study that house. / I think about its jokes and stories”⁷⁰. The Old Man emphasises that the house was once prosperous (“Green leaves, ripe leaves, leaves thick as butter, / Fat greasy life.”⁷¹), and to contrast it with the present he asks: “Where are the jokes and stories of a house, / Its threshold gone to patch a pig-sty?”⁷² As Sandra Siegel puts it, this ancestral house is now “described as being an evil place”⁷³. What is more, the Old Man calls the destruction of the house by his father a capital offence, as the house set ablaze by the father stands for the elimination of the domination of the Irish aristocracy in Ireland, and thus the Unity of Being and the Unity of Culture as well: “But he killed the house; to kill a house / Where great men grew up, married, died, / I here declare a capital offence.”⁷⁴ More importantly, there is a textual reference to the fact that the father destroyed a nobility characterised by erudition (evocative of Yeats ideal of the humanist aristocracy of Renaissance Italy which Yeats saw being reborn in the Protest Aristocracy of his time): “And everything was burnt; / Books, library, all were burnt.”⁷⁵ We can see that the Old Man does not consider his act of double murder a grievous crime but rather a necessary one compared to the father’s deed—failing to murder his father and his own son would be a more serious crime

⁶⁷ Yeats, *Collected Plays*, p. 431.

⁶⁸ Cf. Childs, p. 174.

⁶⁹ Cf. Childs, p. 174.

⁷⁰ Yeats, *Collected Plays*, p. 430.

⁷¹ Yeats, *Collected Plays*, p. 430.

⁷² Yeats, *Collected Plays*, p. 430.

⁷³ Siegel, p. 4.

⁷⁴ Yeats, *Collected Plays*, p. 432.

⁷⁵ Yeats, *Collected Plays*, p. 432.

than killing them, as the latter one would mean that the Old Man remained passive in the face of the oppression of the aristocracy by the merchant class.

The direct consequence of the union of the mother and her drunken groom proves to be the Old Man who, thus, becomes the finest representative of Yeats's model of the degenerate modern man.⁷⁶ His fate is predetermined by his father's low class origin. For instance, the Old Man received only an incomplete, half-education from his father: "He never sent me to school, but some / Half-loved me for my half of her."⁷⁷ It is this incomplete education that causes his tragic fate. Peter Ure explains that if the Old Man were not in a state of half-knowledge, "he would not suppose that the killing of the boy could do more than momentary assuage her torment. This state of half-knowledge is his hereditary condition entailed upon him by his polluted blood [that is, by his father]."⁷⁸

It is also striking that the Boy replies to his father that he (the Old Man) did not give him proper education either, and the Old Man's response incorporates the idea according to which this pollution cannot be eliminated, it cannot be undone, because hereditary, and thus predetermines the fate of the future generations as well: "I gave the education that befits / A bastard that a pedlar got / Upon a tinker's daughter in a ditch."⁷⁹ It also follows that the Old Man stands no chance of becoming a nobleman, an Ascendancy Man. The reason for this predetermination is phrased by the Old Man himself: "Till I become a pedlar on the roads, / No good trade, but good enough / Because I am my father's son, / Because of what I did or may do."⁸⁰ Therefore, there are several textual references to the fact that the cause of his tragic fate is his father, and hence his ceaseless anger and the bitterness of unfulfilled emotions towards the souls of the dead.

Traces of Yeats's ideas on eugenics manifested in the characters' conduct appear in *The Dreaming of the Bones* as well. For instance, there are recurring references to a once better and more illustrious time⁸¹ dominated by the aristocracy—the time before the Normans came in, that is, before the betrayal of Ireland attributed to Diarmuid and Dervorgilla. While leading the Young Man up to the mountain, the Stranger (Diarmuid) explains to him that they know all hiding-places of the hills, but "they had had better hiding-places once."⁸² To this statement, the Young Man immediately replies that "[y]ou'd say they had better before

⁷⁶ Cf. Childs, p. 177.

⁷⁷ Yeats, *Collected Plays*, p. 432.

⁷⁸ Peter Ure qtd. in Siegel, p. 12.

⁷⁹ Yeats, *Collected Plays*, p. 432.

⁸⁰ Yeats, *Collected Plays*, p. 433.

⁸¹ Yeats's longing for the recreation of the conditions of old Ireland is marked by the recurring use of the adjective "ancient" in relation to the Abbey and the landscape (e.g. "ancient hedge").

⁸² Yeats, *Collected Plays*, p. 278.

English robbers / Cut down the trees or set them upon fire / For fear their owners might find shelter there.”⁸³ According to Yeats, this better time was once characterised by unity and the dominance of the Irish intellectual nobility whose descendants should be the new Irish Ascendency of Yeats’s time if it were not oppressed by the merchant class.

What is more, at the top of the mountain, there is the ruined Abbey of Corcomroe which stands for the same unity and represents ancient Ireland as the ruined house in *Purgatory*. Like the Old Man in *Purgatory*, here the Stranger also contrasts the illustrious past to the degenerate present in the description of the Abbey when he says that “[i]n the old days we should have heard a bell / Calling the monks before day broke to pray / And when the day had broken on the ridge, / The crowing of its cocks.”⁸⁴ While in *Purgatory*, it is the father who destroys the house (and symbolically the Irish aristocracy as well), in *Bones*, the destructors are the enemy, the Anglo-Normans who ruin the Abbey and symbolically speaking, the Unity of Culture in Ireland as well.

Moreover, there is another passage worthy of mention concerning the Abbey. The Stranger explains that the Abbey is a place “[w]here mourners for five centuries have carried / Noble or peasant to his burial”⁸⁵. This phrase implies three important ideas: the use of the word “mourners” suggests the mourning of the once better times; what is more, Yeats mentions the noble and the peasant who were the representatives of those two classes which Yeats respected and celebrated as opposed to the destructive merchant class; finally, there is a mention of a “burial” which seems to imply that the ancient nobility is already disappeared and buried.

Bound up with this disappeared nobility, the Young Man roundly condemns those who brought about the process of degeneration in Ireland (those “who made Ireland weak”⁸⁶), and he even imprecates curses upon them. However, the question occurs whether he is any better than those who betrayed Ireland. The Young Man is not an aristocrat, he is an Aran fisher, and nor is he a hero of the Easter Rising, as he did not fight until the end of the Rising with Pearse and the others who soon after gave their blood for Ireland, but the Young Man began fleeing from the police. What is more, his anger towards the couple is useless and groundless, as it was not Diarmuid and Dervorgilla who called the Normans in, but it was Dervorgilla’s husband who committed the treason out of vengeance and jealousy. Moreover, the Young Man declares that the country “[...] if that crime were uncommitted, / Had been most

⁸³ Yeats, *Collected Plays*, p. 278.

⁸⁴ Yeats, *Collected Plays*, p. 280.

⁸⁵ Yeats, *Collected Plays*, p. 279.

⁸⁶ Yeats, *Collected Plays*, p. 280.

beautiful.”⁸⁷ In Yeats’s philosophy, perfect beauty is the attribute of unity, and thus, with this phrase the Young Man directly accuses the couple of causing a criminal damage to Ireland with their betrayal. However, he does not recognise that if he could forgive the adulterous couple and forget the past, the aim of their ‘dreaming back’ would become complete. What is more, if the Irish in general forgave, that might lead to another age of unity in the history of Ireland. The “music of a lost kingdom,”⁸⁸ that is, the music of a harmonious and unified Ireland filled the air, but it withered away due to the Young Man’s failure to recognise his opportunity to change the present situation. This failure is due to the fact that the understanding of his self is impossible for the Young Man, and as a result, his more merciful second-self cannot come to surface.

Bound up with Yeats’s ideas on eugenics and unity related to the process of ‘dreaming back,’ there are two kinds of birds in the play, the cock and the owl, that can contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between the dead and the living. There have been several interpretations of the meaning of these birds. For instance, according to F. A. C. Wilson, these birds are a “clinging symbol, a device which will weld together aesthetically [...] Yeats’s two themes of politics and ghosts.”⁸⁹ Wilson also adds that its “central function is to establish a simple day-night antithesis”⁹⁰. These interpretations imply that the Red Cock of March is associated with the living (the day’s dreamers) and their objectivity, and the politics and present conditions of modern Ireland, while the owl is associated with the souls of the dead (night’s dreamers) and their subjectivity. According to Normann Jeffares, the cock is also an emblem of reincarnation, the symbol of “the first bloody phases of a new historical cycle.”⁹¹ What is more, the cock is also “the symbol of heroic martial endeavour and that universal anarchy that he [Yeats] thought would usher in the collapse of the present ‘objective age’”⁹². Throughout the play, there is a recurring passage sung by the musicians, asking the cock to begin crowing: “Red bird of March, begin to crow! / Up with the neck and clap the wing, / Red cock, and crow!”⁹³ The musicians’ chorus addressing the Red Cock of March seems to serve to wake the living character up from his dreaming, and it is supposed to help him complete the ‘dreaming back’ by virtue of forgiveness. If the cock’s crowing could wake up the Young Man and thus eliminate his bitter feelings, it would result in the collapse of the

⁸⁷ Yeats, *Collected Plays*, p. 283.

⁸⁸ Yeats, *Collected Plays*, p. 284.

⁸⁹ F. A. C. Wilson qtd. in A. Norman Jeffares and A. S. Knowland, *A Commentary on the Collected Plays of W. B. Yeats*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975. p. 161.

⁹⁰ Wilson qtd. in Jeffares and Knowland, p. 161.

⁹¹ Jeffares, p. 161.

⁹² Jeffares, p. 437.

⁹³ Yeats, *Collected Plays*, p. 279.

present and degenerate objective age, and it would lead to the arrival of a new period of unity. It is only after the Young Man's refusal to forgive the couple for their crime that the cocks begin to crow, but by that time the Young Man is already "lost of a sudden, / In that sweet wandering snare."⁹⁴ The word "snare" might refer to his state of being stuck in Dreaming Back, and he is lost, as he failed to proceed towards the state of Beatitude due to his anger towards the dead, and as a result, he became condemned (lost in that snare). Therefore, the play suggests that another age dominated by exceptional men is unlikely to arrive in Ireland.

However, as regards the owl, this bird can be interpreted in two different ways. On the one hand, it is associated with those men who, according to the Young Man, brought about the degeneration in Ireland and whom the protagonist condemns. When the Young Man imprecated curses upon Donough and the others who weakened Ireland, he associates Donough with the owl: "[...] and when I die / I'll leave my body, if I have any choice, / Far from his ivy-tod and his owl."⁹⁵ On the other hand, the owl is a night bird, and thus it is connected to the night's dreamers, that is, the ghosts. Considering that the ghosts seem to be closer to Beatitude and harmony than the Young Man, the owl is associated with the subjective age as well (an age dominated by exceptional men). However, this bird appertains to the dead who are rejected and condemned by the living, and as a result, the degenerate objective age repressed the better subjective age.

⁹⁴ Yeats, *Collected Plays*, p. 284.

⁹⁵ Yeats, *Collected Plays*, p. 280.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, we have seen that in *The Dreaming of the Bones* and *Purgatory*, the question whether it is the dead or the living who are dreaming back is not at all evident. Rather, the foregoing examples have presented that there is, in fact, a dreaming in the dreaming structure, as it turns out that both the dead and the living are dreaming, and that the ghosts and their re-living of one of the crucial past events of their lives are merely a projection of the dreaming of the living character. We have also seen that the aim of this dreaming in the dreaming would be to lead the living to their second-selves through an understanding of their selves, that is, the recognition of their roles in the process of ‘dreaming back’ and the importance of forgiveness. However, we have seen that ‘dreaming back’ is an unfinished purgatorial process due to the fact that the living are incapable of purifying themselves of all emotion, especially of their anger towards the dead, and therefore they remain unpurged of unfulfilled emotions. Thus, both plays are filled with a degenerate objectivity, and even though the plot of both plays seems to be geared to result in a kind of release from the present age of degeneration by a virtuous act of forgiveness, these plays rather feature “rituals that fail to effect cultural rebirth,”⁹⁶ and thus, they symbolically stand for Yeats’s shattered hopes for the creation of the Unity of Culture in modern Ireland.

⁹⁶ Michael Valdez Moses, “Nietzsche,” in *W. B. Yeats in Context*, ed. David Holdeman and Ben Levitas, New York: Cambridge UP, 2010, p. 271.

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