Music for Words: The Role of Accompaniment in Yeats's Late Songs

Grace Whitaker
Fairfax, Virginia

Bachelor of Arts, University of Virginia, 2024

A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the University of Virginia in Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Department of English

University of Virginia
May 2025

Jahan Ramazani, Advisor

Introduction

In the winter of 1927, William Butler Yeats fell gravely ill with a mysterious disease, one from which he "hardly expected to recover" (Wade 732).[1] In time, however, he felt well enough to plan his future, and—likely influenced by his illness—he and his wife resolved to spend every following winter in Rapallo, a coastal Italian town with a temperate climate (Saddlemyer 393). This change seemed to usher in a new era for Yeats: he wrote of this plan, "[it] will make it possible for me to give up everything I really don't like and keep everything that I like" (Wade 732-733). Thus, he began his retirement, "resigning from everything he [could] resign from"—namely, his political engagements in Ireland—and spending his time reading philosophy and writing poetry for his own amusement (Saddlemyer 389; Jeffares 238). In this final decade of his life, Yeats wrote as prolifically as ever, and his poetry mirrored his personal shift away from Irish politics and toward pure, unfettered enjoyment. In the early spring of 1928, he wrote to Olivia Shakespear, "Once out of Irish bitterness I can find some measure of sweetness… already new poems are floating in my head, bird songs of an old man" (Wade 737). Many of the poems of this period truly were "bird songs," as music featured more heavily in his work—in stylistic inspiration, thematic content, and actual accompaniment—than ever before.

Despite Yeats's love for music, his self-proclaimed (and externally reinforced) tone-deafness prevented any real technical experience. He wrote of one instance wherein he sang a tune for his father, after which his father wrote to his teacher that he was "never to be taught to sing again," thus bringing an early end to his musical career (*Autobiographies* 54). Later, many

[1] It seems that not even the doctors could agree on the root of Yeats's illness. In a letter to Olivia Shakespear postmarked April 25, 1928, Yeats described the experience as such: "Two Dublin doctors have sat upon me; the Cannes man said 'Lungs and nervous breakdown can be neglected, nothing matters but blood pressure' and gave me a white pill. The Monte Carlo man said 'Blood pressure and lungs can be neglected, nothing matters but nervous breakdown,' and gave me a brown pill. The Dublin men say 'Blood pressure and nervous breakdown can be neglected, nothing matters but lungs,' and have given me a black pill…" (Wade 742).

of his friends and collaborators considered him to be "insensitive to music," and Yeats often confirmed this sentiment in his correspondence and publications (Cohen 15).[2] However, exploration of Yeats's late career, which featured oral performances, musical collaborations, and broadcast projects, leaves some scholars with a slightly different picture of his musical ability: "Though Yeats could not repeat notes put to him, his sense of pitch… was not quite as it had been represented, his sense of rhythm extraordinarily acute" (Paterson, "Temporary Ideas" 102). Regardless of his musical expertise (or lack thereof), he consistently expressed an "unorthodox but indelible fascination with music" ("Temporary Ideas" 102). Throughout his adult life, Yeats "desperately wished to write songs"; it naturally follows, then, that when the time came to retire from his political obligations, music became preeminent in his poetry (Cohen 15).

As it happened, technical experience was entirely unnecessary for Yeats to incorporate music into his later work. He was in a sense "freed by his ignorance of customary musical theory," able to imagine musical settings and collaborations with uninhibited confidence and passion ("Temporary Ideas" 109). He relied on instinct rather than technical knowledge, and he could, by instinct alone, 'sing' his poems: his readings were almost akin to musical performances, and despite his lack of training, he displayed extraordinary rhythmic and tonal precision. For example, Yeats gave two broadcasted readings of "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," one in 1931 and the other in 1937; although they were done six years apart, the two recordings are remarkably similar, as if Yeats was staying true to a specific tune.[3] The explanation for this consistency across the years is perhaps twofold: not only did he have a surprisingly keen ear for

[2] In the Variorum edition of his plays, for example, Yeats declared that he had "no ear or only a primitive one" (qtd. in Cohen 15).

[3] For further details of these readings, see Paterson's chapter on Yeats's BBC broadcasts, which also includes testimonies from producers and musicians who recognized Yeats's readings as precisely—although unconventionally—musical.

rhythm and semitones, but he also wrote poetry with an acute sense of syntax and meter that gave his work a music of its own.

Indeed, as Yeats began to pursue writing poetry for, alongside, and to musical accompaniment, there emerged a sort of battle between two types of music: that of the songs with which he worked, and that of his poetry. Yeats's focus on word choice, syntax, and "wavering, meditative, organic rhythms" created a subtle music that was intrinsic to his poetry ("Symbolism" 163). And for Yeats, these elements were as specific and unalterable as the musical notes that form a particular chord:

> Although you can expound an opinion, or describe a thing, when your words are not quite so well chosen, you cannot give a body to something that moves beyond the senses, unless your words are as subtle, as complex, as full of mysterious life, as the body of a flower or of a woman. ("Symbolism" 163-164)

This internal music did not always lend itself naturally to existing tunes, which had rhythms and tones of their own. But all of Yeats's collaborations with musical artists revealed just how precise and subtle it was: one composer noted that "one could as easily notate [Yeats's] verses in musical rhythm as scan them in poetic metres" (Stravinsky, qtd. in "Temporary Ideas"). As distinct as the intrinsic music of his poetry was, Yeats still desired to incorporate the melodies and instrumentation of extrinsic music into his work; the last decade of his writing was therefore an ongoing effort to establish a working relationship between the type of music that can be translated to musical staffs and performance and the type of music that "[escapes] analysis, the subtleties that have a new meaning every day" ("Symbolism" 164).

This working relationship between music and poetry might be encapsulated by the term "(musical) accompaniment," although at first glance it might seem too narrow as a category. The

benefit of the word "accompaniment" is its precision: it refers not just to song, but to song *in relationship with* some other actor or action. Music and poetry may certainly exist independently of each other without conflict, and they might even refer to or draw inspiration from one another. The tension arises, however, when one tries to merge the two forms, which have grown distinct from one another in the centuries following the birth of the lyric.[4] This tension is hardly unique to Yeats's experience: numerous theorists, writers, and even composers have contemplated the ever-growing chasm between the tempos, stresses, and structures of music and the internal workings and complexities of poetry. However, the tension was exacerbated by the increasingly complex poetics of Yeats and his contemporaries; Ramazani notes that "the poetics of difficulty in modernism and its aftermath has driven the formal logic of poetry and song farther apart" (Ramazani 190). It was therefore all the more difficult for Yeats to merge his poetry with music, and he expressed frustration at "the two competing tunes and rhythms that were so often at discord with one another," even as he attempted to find a resolution between the two ("Psaltery" 16).

In the final decade of Yeats's career, he dedicated more attention and energy to music than ever before in his work; Cohen notes that "singing became Yeats's dominant theme during these years," and he engaged in collaborative musical projects (including his famous BBC broadcasts in the early 1930s) with increasing regularity (Cohen 22). The works that were written about, inspired by, and performed to music are too numerous to consider fully; however, a few key projects spanning this decade reveal the progression of Yeats's attempts to establish a successful working relationship between musical accompaniment and his writing. *Words for*

[4] There has been some debate as to whether this divergence occurred in the twelfth century, the fifteenth century, or later; see Ramazani's chapter "Poetry and Song" in *Poetry and its Others* for a more thorough treatment of the history (and the nuances) of this divide.

Music Perhaps (1932), "Three Songs to the Same Tune" (1934), and *Broadsides* (1937) are perhaps the three written works that best demonstrate Yeats's engagement with musical accompaniment. Though only the last of these works eventually appeared alongside accompaniment (in print or in performance), music did, in one way or another, play a role in the creation of all three. Taken together, these three writing projects create a picture of Yeats's ongoing effort to unite poetry and music, an effort with which he was only satisfied in his final few years.

Yeats's musicality, though unorthodox, is self-evident; however, the fact remains that the incorporation of musical accompaniment with his work was a long and often frustrating process. The question, then, is whether the process might be characterized as an unmusical poet's attempts to become more musical, as some scholars have suggested, or perhaps a futile—even half-hearted—attempt at uniting two increasingly incompatible forms, or something else altogether. I suggest that a closer look at the writing processes of *Words for Music Perhaps*, "Three Songs to the Same Tune," and the *Broadsides* reveals a poet who is consistently and unflinchingly enthralled by the communal art of song, yet who is unwilling to subordinate his own poetics to that art and must therefore make a number of attempts to establish a satisfactory relationship between the two. What results from this decade is not his most well-known or beloved poetry; it is, however, the fulfillment of a lifelong goal, as well as another lens through which to view the complex relationship between music and poetry.

Chapter One: *Words for Music Perhaps*

In February of 1929, Mrs. Yeats wrote to Thomas MacGreevy, "William… yesterday came dashing along from his cot to announce that he was going to write twelve songs and I had got to purchase 'a musical instrument' at once and set them to music" (Saddlemyer 200). Never mind that she neither owned nor knew how to play an instrument; the mere concept of musical accompaniment was enough to sustain Yeats's new project—one which his wife described as "of a most frivolous nature" (Saddlemyer 200). Yeats did not even specify the instrument she was to purchase, although he likely had a style—or at least a general tone—in mind for his twelve songs (perhaps warranting the "frivolous" descriptor). The idea of musical accompaniment was crucial to the sequence of poems, yet it was merely a concept, preceding any verbal content.

In the three years that elapsed between the birth of Yeats's idea and the eventual publication of the ensuing volume, music remained central to the project. However, as time progressed, the possibility of a musical setting became increasingly remote: within six months, he wrote to Olivia Shakespear about the work, saying, "'For music' is only a name, nobody will sing them" (Wade 769). (Presumably, he had also given up on the prospect of his wife playing an instrument, as nothing more was ever written on the topic.) Then, by the time of publication, "Twelve Poems for Music" had become a 24-poem sequence titled *Words for Music Perhaps*. The crux of the title is the modifier "perhaps," which Paul Cohen described as "wistful," an expression of Yeats's "hope that the appropriate music for these words would eventually be found" (Cohen 16). More recently, Adrian Paterson has proposed that the title was a "half-embarrassed, half-playful, wholly calculated disclaimer" to his initial desire to set the poems to music ("Yeats, Music, and Meaninglessness" 2). Regardless of the exact intent behind the title, it became clear that these poems would be "for music," and yet without it.

Why did Yeats see fit to keep "for music" in the title, tempered only by the ambiguous "perhaps"? He sheds some light on his meaning in a letter he wrote to Shakespear on March 2, 1929, only a few days after George's letter describing the conception of the idea: "I am writing *Twelve poems for music*… no[t] so much that they may be sung as that I may define their kind of emotion to myself. I want them to be all emotional and all impersonal" (Wade 758). Music, then, is a certain quality of poetry that is too difficult to put into words; whatever role accompaniment may or may not play in his work, Yeats's priority is to evoke this inexpressible quality he seems to associate with music. "All emotional and all impersonal" at first appears almost oxymoronic.[5] However, if we define 'impersonal' grammatically—that is, not relating to a particular, personal subject—a possible interpretation of Yeats's plan for the work comes to light. Rather than writing *personal* poems (those which are rooted in individual experience, often his own), he is beginning to broaden his focus, intentionally writing from a collective standpoint—particularly, given his background, an Irish one.

The Irish oral tradition is key to this Irish collective. Throughout his career, Yeats wrote extensively in essays and other works about Irish culture in the face of British colonialism, especially as it relates to orality and literacy. In fact, in his 1938 book *On the Boiler*, he blames Irish literacy—as introduced by British popular education—for the dissolution of Irish culture.[6] "It seems probable that many men in Irish public life should not have been taught to read and write," he says, and yet it is an unavoidable truth that the primary mode of his career is the written word (*On the Boiler* 11). Indeed, though he once wrote to Robert Bridges, "I have never

[5] Although, according to T. S. Eliot (one of Yeats's contemporaries), "the emotion of art is impersonal." This sentiment appeared in his 1919 essay "Tradition and Individual Talent," and though there is no evidence Yeats had read the work at the time of writing this letter, it is not improbable.

[6] Fahmy Farag writes, "Yeats warns that Ireland is being transformed from end to end by an educational system based on the British model… [which] will eventually threaten the Irish identity and lead to the decay and the ultimate disintegration of the individual and society" (Farag 9). Yeats seems to simultaneously fear the dissolution of Irish culture and that of the individuality of man; for him, it seems, the former is somewhat rooted in the latter.

felt that reading was better than an error," he not only wrote prolifically himself, but also greatly enjoyed reading for pleasure (Wade 354).[7] His primary objection to literacy as he describes it is not actually an issue of literacy; rather, he opposes formal education insofar as it hinders the "natural cultivation of the peasant" (Farag 8). Such cultivation, brought about in part by generations of storytelling and lively singing, seems to be central to the culture of the Irish people, "theirs by long inheritance" (Farag 9). It is not literature that Yeats dislikes, just the limiting structures imposed on the Irish that are in direct opposition to their natural, genuine means of cultivating knowledge.

Yeats's ideal version of education (although 'cultivation' would perhaps be a more fitting term) is instead rooted in Ireland's long-standing oral tradition. As Farag writes, "Yeats is convinced that the Irish are oral people who believe in the magic of the spoken or chanted word… that a genuine Irish culture could only evolve from the oral and visionary tradition that produced the folklore… that Irish poetry and Irish stories were made to be spoken or sung" (10). Though his own career is inextricable from literacy, he is devoted to the orality he views as central to Irish cultural heritage. Literacy and orality therefore exist in tandem, and it seems that Yeats's solution to their seeming contradiction is to attempt to incorporate the collective Irish culture into the written literature. It is Yeats's love for inherited Irish literature, then, as well as a desire to sustain the old ways of transmitting it, that fuels his arguments—ironically, written—against Irish literacy.

Likewise, I would argue that Yeats's seemingly contradictory opinions on music and vocal performance may stem from a distinction he makes between two possible approaches: the

[7] Yeats made this claim in the context of a discussion of the oral performance of his poetry; at the time, he was working on a project in which a vocalist would "chant the dialogues in verse to a psaltery" (Wade 354). This project is further evidence of a long-running interest in reviving the Irish oral tradition, despite his deep involvement in the publishing industry (as a prolifically published poet and a benefactor of his sisters' publishing company) as well.

natural and the contrived. When Yeats declares, "I [want] all my poetry to be said on a stage or sung" and that "the singer… trained by some voice-producer to turn language into honey and oil, cannot sing poetry," he seems to be considering two different types of music—that is, two different approaches to it ("Introduction" 529; "Temporary Ideas" 112).[8] He disparages technical musical training and performance in the same way he disparages literacy: insofar as they inhibit natural expression, particularly in the context of Irish literature and art, they are counterproductive. "I have always known that there was something I disliked about singing, and I naturally dislike print and paper," Yeats writes, drawing his own connection between these two subjects, both adjacent—and yet somehow contrary to—Irish oral tradition ("Psaltery" 13). Certainly the "something [he] disliked" must be distinct somehow from the kind of singing he envisioned for his own work, as he expressed his desire for vocal performances of his poetry (in word and in deed) numerous times throughout his career. I propose that just as his preference for education is rooted in Irish oral tradition, so is his preferred philosophy of vocal performance—a philosophy that might have its roots in the traditional, quasi-musical Irish bard.

Bardic tradition is central to the history of Irish orality; early Irish bards not only sang poetry but were also "entrusted with the preservation of the literature and history of the country" (O'Grady, qtd. in Mong 97). This bardic tradition appealed greatly to Yeats, and he was certainly invested in the preservation of Irish literature, history, and culture.[9] So it seems reasonable to propose that his "all emotional and all impersonal" songs are in some sense an evocation of the bardic tradition: impassioned lyrics that exist from and for its community. As Cohen writes,

---

[8] There is often a difference in genre between the two, as well: certain genres of music certainly lend themselves to easy memorization and recitation, whereas others have historically involved training and orchestration. However, the approach distinction is primary, whereas the genre distinction is implied.

[9] See "Yeats and the Bardic Tradition" in *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies,* in which Ambrose Ih-Ren Mong paints a more detailed picture of Yeats's appreciation of the bardic tradition, interweaving the history of the bard with Yeats's own publishing history.

"Songs suggested a link with the common people, and with popular emotions. A song might reach a man who would never open a book of poetry. The prospect of a new audience spurred Yeats into developing a new style of expression" (Cohen 16). Indeed, *Words for Music Perhaps* was the start of a new type of writing for Yeats. In exchanging the personal for the impersonal, he took on the role of the bard, singing of and on behalf of the Irish people. His "words for music" are therefore not about the actual music; regardless of critics' theories as to why he gave up on setting them to music, the fact is that concrete musical accompaniment is unnecessary to what Yeats seems to be attempting through these poems.

And while no particular set of songs ever appeared to accompany these poems, every poem in the *Words for Music Perhaps* sequence evokes folk song in one way or another. The "Crazy Jane" poems, which make up the first third of the sequence, are rooted in the popular ballad; Paterson notes that the tone of these songs is distinctly "sharp, salty, and sexual, borrowing from popular song, while finding a tone of voice and timbre that potentially plumbed a more profound musical resonance" ("Yeats and Crazy Jane" 2).[10] Several poems call themselves music in their titles—"His Song," "Her Song," and "Lullaby" are among these—and still others contain indications of song in their bodies. "Those Dancing Days are Gone," for example, begins "Come, let me sing into your ear," presenting the rest of the following poem as the speaker's song. Likewise, most of "Tom the Lunatic" is the song that Tom sings, as with "Tom at Cruachan." Also present throughout the sequence is a frequent use of refrains, even nonsensical ones such as "fol de rol, fol de rol," a common refrain in traditional folk tunes

[10] The sources of Yeats's inspiration for Crazy Jane were two quasi-folkloric local figures: a wise woman who dealt herbal remedies, and an audacious singer-satirist called 'Cracked Mary' ("Yeats and Crazy Jane" 3).

("Crazy Jane Reproved"). These music-evoking qualities are not new to Yeats; however, they appear with remarkable frequency in this collection, as well as in many of his works to come.[11]

Even as he adopted the bardic role, he did so in a new context: he was a "modern manifestation of the ancient bard," distinguished by the formal and thematic evolution between the ancient tradition and the modern era of poetry (Schuchard 2). Unlike many of the orally transmitted lyrics of old, and unlike popular Irish ballads, Yeats's own poetry—even as he began to pursue orality and musicality more intently—retained the inventiveness, the density of imagery, and the "strange cadences" by which his work was known (Schuchard 15). Some have seen the remaining complexities in this body of work as evidence of Yeats's unmusicality, as if he struggled to regulate his decisive lines and syntax to a more palatable ballad form. However, it is reasonable, even appropriate, to assume that he intentionally retained elements of his previous style, rather than abandon all of his poetics to write a simple ballad. *Words for Music Perhaps* seems instead to be an attempt on Yeats's part to combine his own poetics with the "all emotional and all impersonal" quality of music. In fact, his admiration of the bardic tradition has less to do with the genre of its poetry and more to do with the "inherited subject-matter known to the whole people" (*Autobiographies* 164).[12] As an Irishman, he is particularly interested in Irish culture and Irish ballads, but they do not seem to be crucial, in his estimation, to accomplishing bardic work.

Though he does not abandon his poetic style in his attempt at renewing Irish oral tradition, he does create room for the evocation—just not the imitation—of traditional Irish folk song in this work; this chapter focuses on a few key poems that best represent the presence of

[11] For a more detailed history of Yeats's use of refrains, particularly the "fol de rols," see Paul Cohen's "Words for Music Perhaps: Yeats's Late Songs."
[12] Yeats cites Homer and Dante, as well as Wolfram of Eschenbach, all poets from different contexts whose works had oral tradition in common.

folk song throughout the 24-poem sequence. In his letter to Olivia Shakespear introducing his original plan for the work, Yeats stated that he has already completed the first three poems, including one which he believed to be his "best lyric for some years" (Wade 758). It was "Three Things," a lyric in which a "bone upon the shore" sings in three parts of the joys of life (1).[13] The bone's three subjects are all near-universal experiences of love; in this sense, the speaker of the poem might function as a stand-in for collective experience—much like a bard would. Yeats further depersonalizes the poem by making the speaker a bone, detached from any particular traits, reduced to a core part of all human beings. While the speaker accomplishes the "impersonal" quality, the song serves as the vessel for the "emotional." As Yeats writes to Shakespear of this and the other lyrics, "They are… all praise of joyous life, though in the best of them it is a dry bone on the shore that sings the praise" (Wade 758).

Indeed, the bone sings, but it did not always do so. In fact, manuscripts reveal that Yeats went back and forth several times on the matter, often replacing "sang" with "cried" only to revert back again.[14] Here, critics who categorize Yeats's "perhaps" as wistful or ironic might see this indecision as support for the idea that Yeats tried and failed to write words for music. However, the distinction between "sang" and "cried" may not be a matter of attempting the former and defaulting to the latter; instead, I suggest that the vacillation between the two words indicates Yeats's desire to capture a concept that lies somewhere between their individual meanings. The bardic tradition was a quasi-musical one itself, closer to a melodic chanting than either singing or speaking. Indeed, this is reflected in Yeats's recitations of his own poetry: while

[13] The other two poems were "Mad as the Mist and Snow" and "Crazy Jane on the King." At the time of writing, he had also written two other poems, "At Algeciras" and "Mohini Chatterjee," which would later be published in the same volume but not included in the "Words for Music Perhaps" section (Clark, *Words for Music* xxxvi).
[14] David Clark's manuscript edition of *Words for Music Perhaps and Other Poems* includes scans from several of Yeats's journals throughout his entire writing process. According to Clark's records, the drafts of "Three Things" appeared almost back-to-back in the same notebook, indicating that very little time passed between drafts; Yeats was frequently and rapidly changing his mind on the topic.

he never explicitly set his poems to a tune, he spoke them in a lilting, semi-melodic voice, with a consistency of pitch and rhythm that suggested internal music.[15] The bardic manner of recitation is paradoxically distinct and nebulous: it occupies an undefined space between the spoken word and song, yet it is easily distinguished and even evaluated by those who listen to it.[16] It is perhaps this manner of recitation Yeats imagines in "Three Things," hence his difficulty in committing to "sang" or "cried," neither of which fully captures the quality of sound.

Just as Yeats's indecision in "Three Things" reflects the tempered presence of music in the work (the essence of the titular "perhaps"), so does the alternating use of singing and crying throughout the rest of the poems in the sequence. In "Those Dancing Days are Gone," for example, the verb "sing" appears in every stanza; early drafts, however, reveal a series of changes similar to that of "Three Things." The first line, "Come, let me sing into your ear," was originally "I cry to that old woman there," and above that line Yeats had both written and crossed out the substitution "sing."[17] Even in poems where it appears Yeats more easily decided between "sing" and "cry," the two seem to be nearly interchangeable.[18] This is due to the context of the poems, which in nearly every instance indicates the particular type of singing Yeats prefers: lively and untrained, the natural outpouring of passion. This type of singing is, in fact, more like crying out than vocal performance, and yet it is more melodic—somehow naturally so—than mere shouting.

---

[15] Several biographers and researchers have discussed these recordings; see Adrian Paterson's "Music Will Keep Out Temporary Ideas: W. B. Yeats's Radio Performances" for further details.
[16] Schuchard's *The Last Minstrels: Yeats and the Revival of the Bardic Arts* details meetings of the "Rhyming Club," in which Yeats and others participated in rhythmic, chant-like recitations of poetry. Yeats "became, as Ernest Rhys attested, 'by far the best' reader among them," demonstrating a certain measurable skill (Schuchard 15).
[17] Scans of Yeats's Rapallo notebooks with these markings can be found on pages 506-507 of David Clark's manuscript edition of *Words for Music Perhaps and Other Poems.*
[18] See "Tom the Lunatic," "I am of Ireland," and "The Dancer at Cruachan and Cro-Patrick," for example.

Likewise, the instances of 'crying' throughout the work, as well as other forms of utterance, are all somewhat musical. This is due in part to Yeats's prolific use of refrain, which creates a songlike structure even when the language of the poem does not indicate musicality. Also contributing to this effect are the uncomplicated rhyme schemes that dominate the sequence; their regularity and simplicity evoke the type of rhyme that appears in songs, particularly easily learned and often-repeated folk songs. The "Crazy Jane" series, which comprises almost a third of *Words for Music Perhaps*, utilizes both of these effects. There is no explicit mention of singing until the fifth poem, which ends, "My body makes no moan / but sings on: / all things remain in God" ("Crazy Jane on God" 21-23). However, long before this point, consistently simple rhyme schemes and the frequent presence of refrains implicitly evoke musicality. "Crazy Jane and the Bishop," for example—the first poem in the series—utilizes an *aabcccb* rhyme pattern consistently across five stanzas, with the '*b*' lines as the poem's refrain. The following poem, "Crazy Jane Reproved" (whose *ababccc* pattern is fairly consistent with the former), punctuates each stanza with "Fol de rol, fol de rol" (7, 14). These non-lexical vocables, though of course nonsensical, contribute to the poem an aspect of folk song especially common in traditional Irish music.

Also adding to our sense of the "Crazy Jane" series as song is its content; as much as the poems' structures evoke folk song, so does their titular character. Crazy Jane originated more than 100 years prior to Yeats's series; she first appeared in a poem by Matthew Gregory Lewis, a popular Gothic novelist, at the turn of the 19th century. However, the archetype represented by Jane has an even broader history: Paterson writes, "Crazy Jane's originator was hardly original, borrowing a familiar trope of an abandoned woman sent out of her wits" ("Yeats and Crazy Jane" 4). Immediately after Lewis's poem was published, several composers began setting it to

music; it even became "a favorite song" for a number of female vocalists ("Yeats and Crazy Jane" 5). She appeared in broadsides, ballets, and other mediums in the years to come, reaching urban and rural audiences alike and becoming a widely-recognized and culturally relevant literary—and musical—figure.[19] When Yeats chose this name for the leading lady of his poems, then, he was drawing on a figure with a musical background and a popular folk presence. Yeats's Crazy Jane was also inspired in part by a real-life "locally notorious figure" called 'Cracked Mary,' a sharp-tongued wise old woman who was often drunk and boasted a notable singing ability ("Yeats and Crazy Jane" 3). Crazy Jane therefore has roots in fictional and local legend alike, both of which connect her to music.

At the same time, however, the overt sexuality and the sharp, often crude dialogue at work in these poems create what might be considered a "vulgar off-key noise," rather than "deliberate artsongs" ("Yeats and Crazy Jane" 2). (Even the religious leader's language is startlingly crude: "Those breasts are flat and fallen now," the Bishop observes in "Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop.")[20] Formally and thematically, these poems are rooted in folk tradition and yet have a dimension of frenetic energy that is particular to Yeats. Though "Crazy Jane and the Bishop" has a regular rhyme scheme and a repeated refrain, it actually utilizes two refrains in each stanza ("All find safety in the tomb" and "The solid man and the coxcomb"), adding to the complexity of the poem (3, 7). "Double refrains can be doubly unstable," Paterson notes, and indeed, the first refrain often functions as a counterintuitive interjection between its two surrounding lines ("Yeats and Crazy Jane" 17). "Tomb" and "coxcomb" are also slant rhymes, so

[19] Among her many appearances in literature, music, and visual art, "Crazy Jane gave rise to all sorts of cultural phenomena: hats and racehorses were named after her; real people given the appellation in court cases and newspaper headlines" ("Yeats and Crazy Jane" 12).
[20] The same poem also includes the rather subversive line "Love has pitched its mansion in / the place of excrement" (15-16).

even the frequent refrains feel slightly erratic, never quite in tune with one another. These are hardly formal shortcomings on Yeats's part; he has proven himself to be a master of syntax and rhythm. Rather, they seem part of an intentional effort to establish the voice of Crazy Jane, as well as a demonstration of Yeats's ability to subvert the conventions of the ballad, simultaneously holding its traditional roots and his own inventive writing style.

In fact, throughout *Words for Music Perhaps,* Yeats draws upon structures, characters, and tones that are rooted in folk tradition. The figure of Old Tom, for example, is as archetypal as his counterpart Crazy Jane. He, like Jane, is "crazy"—in his first poem he is called "old Tom the Lunatic"—and yet he is also portrayed as somewhat of a sage. This duality is a divergence from a ballad's expected stock character: Tom's philosophizing is poetic and wise, providing his character with a depth that surpasses typical folk characterizations. It is also reminiscent of Yeats's writings on Irish literacy: Old Tom is neither educated nor dignified, but he is connected to nature and his community, and he has therefore benefitted from the "natural cultivation of the peasant" that Yeats so highly values (Farag 8).[21] The Crazy Jane and Old Tom poems are perhaps the most saturated in Irish folk song, through their quintessentially Irish speakers as well as their very structures. They utilize easily remembered rhymes, meters, and refrains, fitting for the simple diction of their peasant speakers and especially reminiscent of folk song. They are not unintelligent, but the simplicity of their structures allows them to be more easily recited; this approach mirrors Yeats's perspective on music (and even literature) as something that should come naturally, rather than through training and technique.[22] Though aspects of musicality are

[21] He "sleeps under the canopy"—the night sky—and refers to several members of his community by name ("Huddon and Duddon and Daniel O'Leary"); despite his living arrangements and proclaimed lunacy, he is not an isolated man (ll. 2, 7).

[22] These songs are not quite intuitively singable; Yeats's occasional exceptions to rhythm and rhyme are perhaps a shade too complicated for an untrained singer. However, their structures are reminiscent of ballads, even if they are not exactly ballads themselves.

interwoven throughout the entirety of *Words for Music Perhaps,* I argue that the music emerges most distinctly in these moments in which Irish folk tradition is evoked.

Just as Crazy Jane and Old Tom highlight the "music" of this work, so do all of the poems' various personas contribute to the "all emotional and all impersonal" quality Yeats attributed to music (Wade 758). By using these figures as his mouthpiece, Yeats separates himself from his material, allowing it to occupy an "impersonal" space. Whether the speakers are distinct characters (like Crazy Jane and Old Tom), unspecified third person pronouns, or even "a bone upon the shore," these figures allow Yeats to step into the role of the bard, singing of and on behalf of the Irish people as a whole, rather than his own personal life. Crazy Jane and Old Tom are memorable and accessible characters; though the content of their stories is unique to their circumstances (Crazy Jane's exploits are comedic, but unrelatable—even offensive—to the Irish Catholic masses), their simple and facetious songs are broadly appealing, as well as easily learned. They are therefore universal in reception, if not in content. The work's other personas, though, sing of more relatable experiences: the unnamed girl and the young man, for example, two other figures whose songs constitute much of *Words for Music Perhaps*, speak about the universal themes of love and mortality.[23] Particularly when dealing with such abstract topics, these personas create a degree of separation between Yeats and the words he writes, allowing him to speak more generally on behalf of the people; regardless of genre, this is the way in which he most resembles a modern bard.

Yet Yeats does not seem to strive for universality in the truest sense of the word; rather, several of these poems concentrate specifically on the Irish experience. Locality emerges in the poems alongside their broader abstract themes: two poems take place in Cruachan, a site with

[23] In fact, every other persona in *Words for Music Perhaps* is unnamed. This only adds to the sense of universality; the speakers are so 'impersonal' as to have no defined identity.

ancient Irish origins, and Irish names (like "Huddon and Duddon, and Daniel O'Leary") appear in the sequence as well.[24] It is not just folk tradition generally through which the music emerges, but Irish folk tradition, and it is the Irish collective to and for whom these songs exist. For example, "I am of Ireland," which appears near the end of the sequence, begins,

> "I am of Ireland,
> And the Holy Land of Ireland,
> And time runs on," cried she.
> "Come out of charity,
> Come dance with me in Ireland." (1-5)

This refrain appears thrice in the poem, and—true to Yeats's style—it builds in meaning and intensity each time it is repeated. Further, this refrain is deeply connected to "Ireland," which appears by name three times in each repetition. Though the poem's "she" (one of many personas at work in *Words for Music Perhaps*) is never explicitly singing, her dialogue occupies a musical space: not only do her words compose the quasi-musical refrain, but she is another example of the passionate half-singing communicated by the verb "cried." Further, her invitation to dance implies the presence of music—particularly the folk music that often accompanies traditional dances—even without mentioning it explicitly. Here we see another connection between Irish culture and music: "Come dance with me in Ireland" seems to imply that the dancing (and therefore the music) is localized in Ireland. Dancing had long since been an element of Irish culture, but here, dancing and music seem to belong to Ireland itself in some way.

[24] See "The Dancer at Cruachan and Cro-Patrick," "Tom the Lunatic," and "Tom at Cruachan."

Despite all these hints and evocations of music throughout the work, Yeats's *Words for Music Perhaps* was never accompanied by actual music.[25] And, perhaps somewhat paradoxically, the lack of musical setting has in a way allowed the "impersonal" quality of the music (that is, communal rather than individual) to remain impersonal. These songs are not restricted to a particular melody; they are therefore all the more universal, able to be adapted and reimagined countless times over. In this sense, they retain the "all emotional and all impersonal" quality of music despite—and perhaps because of—the lack of particular accompaniment. Indeed, from the very conception of this work, Yeats has been playing with music and written text, orality and literacy, the emotional and the impersonal. The titular "perhaps" has been at work in all of these tensions, demonstrative of Yeats's attempts to push together these seemingly contrary ideas, merging the simplicity (and accessibility) of the oral tradition with his own inventive poetics.

[25] That is, not under his direction. Decades after Yeats's death, however, composer Michael Tippett set several poems from the sequence to music for a chamber ensemble and vocalists. More recently, Steven Gerber has taken on the sequence, this time for a soprano and two violins.

Chapter Two: "Three Songs to the Same Tune"

In 1933, within a year of publishing *Words for Music Perhaps,* Yeats began writing a poem titled "Three Songs to the Same Tune." In a letter to Olivia Shakespear that November, he wrote, "I am slightly suffering from blood pressure and an attempt to write a new national song—three versions to the tune of O'Donnell Abu to be sung at the Abbey Theatre" (Wade 818).[26] Very little time passed between the writing of the original version and the two that soon accompanied it; from nearly the beginning of the songwriting process, the work was instilled with the uncommon quality of several songs belonging concurrently to one tune. The language used to describe the work is likewise uncommon: though it consists of three songs, it is referred to as one poem (rather than a set or a group of poems).[27] This language communicates a distinction between song and poem, although the words have often been used interchangeably; each song belongs to "the tune of O'Donnell Abu," but the poem itself is the compilation of all three songs.

The title "Three Songs to the Same Tune" is striking, and it reveals a marked difference between the role of music in Yeats's earlier work and the role it plays in these. First, we might compare Yeats's choice of the word "tune" in this title to the more abstract "music" that appeared in *Words for Music Perhaps*. The word "tune" suggests a specificity that was notably lacking in Yeats's previous quasi-musical work; Yeats is no longer dealing in the mere concept of music, but in a particular instance of it. This effect is furthered by the definite article "the" appearing in the title, as well as the fact that the songs are in some way affected—even formed—by the particular tune. In this work, music is not just a concept, nor is it a mere influence on the works' creation; it is a distinct and impactful aspect of the poem, significant enough to define the

[26] In his writing, Yeats (incorrectly) omits the accent mark in the Irish word "Abú."
[27] This is the standard of Richard Finneran, David Clark, and others, so I have adopted it here.

title and bind the three songs together in one unit. (No longer does Yeats urge his wife to purchase an instrument for some vague future composition; this time, he begins with an already known piece of music as his framework.) And yet, like the music in *Words for Music Perhaps,* it is still somewhat tempered: 'the tune' is referred to in the poem, although it is incumbent on the reader to recognize it by name and imagine the application of the lyrics to the music.

For readers who can recognize the tune, "O'Donnell Abú" contributes a layer of meaning to the three songs. It is a spirited traditional Irish song, fitting with the genre of music Yeats has previously wanted to evoke, with strong romantic nationalist themes that make it a perfect candidate for a new national song. Its original lyrics, written by Michael James McCann in 1843, described a sixteenth-century Gaelic lord and commander, Red Hugh O'Donnell.[28] O'Donnell was a key figure in the Nine Years' War, a rebellion against English rule in Ireland, and the lyrics are a patriotic war cry. The song begins with the assembly of squadrons and the sounding of trumpets, and the first chorus creates a picture of the song's primary themes:

> On, ev'ry mountaineer, strangers to flight or fear
> Rush to the standard of dauntless Red Hugh
> Bonnaught and Gallowglass, throng from each mountain pass
> Onward for Erin, "O'Donnell Abú!"[29] (McCann, lines 5-8)

The song is an Irish march, both in musical genre and in lyrical content, and its political associations would be well-known to anyone who recognized the name. Even without the context of the lyrics, the title "O'Donnell Abú" gives an indication of nationalist or military meaning, as

[28] There is some debate as to the origin of the tune itself: some credit the music to Joseph Halliday, a 19th-century bandmaster, though many others say that the tune is "at least as old as the 16th century" (Flood 501). Either way, McCann's 1843 lyrics were the first well-known lyrics to accompany the tune, and they remain the most widely accepted lyrics to the song even today.

[29] "Erin" (derived from the Gaelic "Éirinn," the dative singular of "Éire") literally means "Ireland." "Abú" is an Irish interjection meaning "forever" ("Éire, n."; "abú, in.").

"Abú" was widely known as an Irish war cry. The tune is therefore an actor in Yeats's poem, as it brings with it particular historical context and emotional quality that interacts with Yeats's words.

Study of "Three Songs to the Same Tune" often revolves—understandably—around Yeats's political involvements, particularly his interest in "the Blueshirts, an Irish fascist organization, for whom these marching songs were originally conceived" (Clark, *Parnell's Funeral* xxvii). The exact influence of the Blueshirts on Yeats's desire to compose a new national song is unclear, particularly because by the time he wrote of his own writing process, he had already become disillusioned with them (and with other contemporary political groups). He wrote extensively on the distinction he wished to create between the Blueshirts and himself, though; he revised the poems, changed their order, and submitted them to the *Spectator* in early 1934, where they appeared in print alongside a note that outlined his disapproval of the Blueshirt movement.[30] Accompanying his submission was a letter that more briefly explained his stance:

> …They were to have been sung from the Abbey Theatre stage tomorrow night but at the last moment I have been compelled to withdraw them. The situation both between the Government and the IRA and between the Blueshirts and the IRA has become too acute. For certain reasons I am very anxious to have them published immediately and in some paper that has no connections with Irish parties. (Clark, *Parnell's Funeral* xxvii-xxviii)

Regardless of Yeats's own political standings or the exact degree to which they influenced his writing, by the time these songs appeared in print, he had made it clear that they were not to be associated with any political party or organization. It was to this end that he removed the

[30] Although Yeats wrote in the note to the *Spectator* that he had rewritten the songs, Clark notes that the version he submitted was "essentially not much different from the first drafts" (Clark, *Parnell's Funeral* xxix).

performance aspect of the songs (which had been central to their conception), limiting them to a print format and therefore dampening, at least slightly, their songlike quality.

He did, however, make an effort to note that the work was still a musical one. In the same letter to the *Spectator,* he added, "Please notice that all three poems have the same chorus… it really is a poem for singing and getting its whole quality from that chorus" (Clark, *Parnell's Funeral* xxviii). Despite cancelling the only planned performance of the piece, he still communicated his desire that someone (whether readers or performers, he never said) might still sing it. Indeed, rather than including the full text of the refrain, as is common practice in poetry, Yeats simply wrote "Those fanatics, &c." in place of each refrain (after its first instance), a notation a singer might encounter in a lyric sheet or a book of songs (*Spectator* 20). He also maintained the rhyme scheme of the song's 1843 lyrics; perhaps he intentionally sought to evoke them in his work, or perhaps it just seemed to him to be the most appropriate rhyme scheme for such a structure, but the similarity would certainly make it easier for readers familiar with the original to apply his new lyrics to the tune.[31] Though these poems were no longer to be associated with the Blueshirts, they were evidently still intended to be sung.

It is in this intention that this work most closely resembles *Words for Music Perhaps,* even as they differ significantly in genre.[32] Just as Yeats used those songs as "a link with the common people, and with popular emotions," so did he approach this writing process with an eye toward the common Irishman (Cohen 16). In fact, about this latter process, he wrote, "I wanted to write what some crowd in the street might understand and sing" (*Variorum* 543). But

[31] Interestingly, though, Yeats's stanza breaks diverged from the original. While the song's original lyrics consisted of four-line verses and six-line refrains, Yeats wrote six-line verses and a four-line refrain. This might create an awkward singing experience for readers primarily familiar with the former structure.

[32] In fact, "Three Songs to the Same Tune" (at least the earlier versions) were anomalous in Yeats's body of work. Though he wrote political poetry, it was never so straightforward; rather, it was full of internal conflict and complexity.

this time, of course, he took the desire a step further; he asked his friends to supply a tune for the project, and they suggested "O'Donnell Abú." The three songs were then composed with this tune in mind; unlike *Words for Music Perhaps* ("only a name, nobody will sing them," Yeats said), these songs had a concrete tune as their foundation (Wade 769). "Anybody may sing them," Yeats wrote of these, "… if they are singable—musicians say they are but may flatter—and worth singing" (*Variorum* 544). This comment demonstrates Yeats's typical hesitancy regarding his own musicality, but compared to *Words for Music Perhaps,* he seems much more confident, if not in his musical prowess, then in the degree to which these poems might be considered true songs.

Although one might expect that the use of a particular tune would unify and solidify the accompanying lyrics, it seems that Yeats had the opposite experience. Indeed, the process of writing "Three Songs to the Same Tune" spanned several years, multiple titles, and countless revisions. Some of these changes, particularly in the first few iterations of the songs, can be attributed to Yeats's evolving opinion of the Blueshirts. When it became clear to him that their views diverged from his own, he no longer wanted his songs associated with them, but it was too late: according to Yeats's correspondence on the subject, it seems that the Blueshirts had begun marching to a song of the same tune, but different lyrics. "Now companies march to the words 'Blueshirt Abu,'" Yeats lamented, "and a song that is all about shamrocks and harps or seems all about them… I did not write that song: I could not if I tried" (*Spectator* 20). He seems to disparage the Blueshirts' new song not only for its politics, but for its poetic inadequacy: a marching song "all about shamrocks and harps" is simplistic, even cliché, and yet that is exactly the type of song that would be easily digested and adopted as the rallying cry of passionate nationalists. That type of song is perhaps better suited to the trumpets and drums of the march,

but it was far more banal than anything Yeats could stand to be associated with; he was therefore eager to distance himself from the group and their "Blueshirt Abú."

This desire spurred Yeats on to more significant revisions: "Three Songs to the Same Tune" appeared again in *Poetry* in late 1934 (less than a year after its appearance in the *Spectator*), this time accompanied by a small work of prose titled "Commentary on the Three Songs," which described the intention behind this next set of revisions:

> Because a friend belonging to a political party wherewith I had once some loose associations, told me that it had, or was about to have, or might be persuaded to have, some such aim as mine, I wrote these songs. Finding that it neither would nor could, I increased their fantasy, their extravagance, their obscurity, that no party might sing them. (*Variorum* 837)

Despite Yeats's original desire that "some crowd in the street" might easily be able to understand and sing his work (the desire that drove him to write for a particular tune in the first place), he soon found that an aspect of his work could be used instead by other crowds for purposes contrary to his own. In this sense, the particularity of 'the tune' actually began to work against him, creating and sustaining associations that he did not intend. He then had to take intentional steps to distance his songs from the tune, therefore diminishing others' ability to sing them (despite retaining the centrality of the tune in the title).

These steps away from the tune—the increase of the songs' "fantasy, their extravagance, their obscurity"—actually brought the work closer to Yeats's own style. This is not to say that Yeats's work is inherently unmusical; rather, his lifelong emphasis on sound and rhythm reveals a natural awareness of the intrinsic music of poetry, much subtler and more nuanced than the music of a marching tune. Using such a tune as the foundation for his writing process required

him to subordinate his poetry to that tune, thereby restricting it in ways that were incompatible with the natural outflow of emotion he typically achieved in his poetics. This was doubly an issue because the tune he chose, as strident in its beating rhythm as the Blueshirts' lyrics were in cliché patriotism, clashed so dramatically with his layered symbolism and innovative form. By giving the music (especially this particular music) precedence over the poetry, "Three Songs to the Same Tune" was perhaps destined from the start to be somewhat of a failed experiment, given its utter incompatibility with Yeats's poetic philosophy and methodology. Despite his desire to incorporate poetry and melody, and despite his original goal to create something that could be sung, he found himself moving away from the music in order to return to his principles as a poet.

He did manage to successfully adjust these songs; in fact, the *Spectator* and the *Poetry* versions of these songs are remarkably different from one another, despite appearing in the same calendar year.[33] Perhaps most notably, he moved away from the singular refrain that had united all three songs, as well as the notation ("Those fanatics, &c.") that had been particularly reminiscent of song lyrics. In this new, more complex version, each song had its own chorus, and each chorus had its own slightly different meter, further disunifying the three songs that still supposedly—if only according to the title—shared a tune. Only one song, "Grandfather sang it under the gallows," retained the original chorus:

> Those fanatics all that we do would undo;
>
> Down the fanatic, down the clown;
>
> Down, down, hammer them down,
>
> Down to the tune of O'Donnell Abu. (*Poetry* 127)

[33] It should be noted that the next few versions of the poem, including that which appears in *A Full Moon in March* are nearly identical to the *Poetry* magazine version, barring a few grammatical tweaks.

The other two songs' choruses are awkwardly, if not dramatically, different from the original version: though Yeats maintained similar line lengths, one has only to read them aloud to notice the rhythms and stresses that no longer correspond with the original refrain. Although he posited that it would be "their fantasy, their extravagance, their obscurity" that prevented parties from singing these three songs (and indeed, he toyed with the content of the lyrics until they once again resembled his body of work), the much-changed meter was the greatest obstacle to singing this new version. The new chorus of the second song ("Justify all those renowned generations"), for example, ends "'Drown all the dogs,' said the fierce young woman," and while the line matches the number of syllables of the original refrain's final line, it ends on a trochee rather than an iamb.[34] This diverges from the natural stress of the tune enough to interrupt any attempt at singing these new lyrics, especially for one who was familiar with the rhythms of the previous version (and the original 1843 lyrics, with which Yeats's first version was more rhythmically consistent).[35]

Even the naming of "O'Donnell Abú" was limited to only the first song's refrain; the three ceased to be unified even by recurring mention of the tune, despite their collective title maintaining the centrality of 'the tune' to the work as a whole. One change made to the third song ("The soldier takes pride in saluting his Captain") between the *Spectator* and the *Poetry* publications keenly reveals the shifting role of 'the tune' in the work. The penultimate verse of this song had previously ended, "Lift, every mother's son, / Lift, lift, lift up the tune" (15-16).[36]

---

[34] This is the second song in the later versions; however, when it appeared in *Spectator,* it was the first song of the three.

[35] Certain musical rhythms lend themselves to certain vocal stress. For example, the tune's chorus ends on a sixteenth note followed by a dotted eighth, which imitates the 'length' of the syllables in an iamb; it was therefore well suited to the original lyrics' "Abú" and less compatible with the trochaic "woman" of the later version.

[36] Drafts of this poem are compiled in "*Parnell's Funeral and Other Poems" from "A Full Moon in March,"* a manuscript edition of a volume of Yeats's in which "Three Songs to the Same Tune" appeared. The particular version quoted here was published in the February 23, 1934 edition of the *Spectator*.

In the new version, however, the same lines read, "March, march—how does it run?— / O any old words to a tune" (*Variorum* 548). This newly flippant tone perhaps hints at Yeats's own frustration with the fruits of his quasi-musical labor; indeed, from his perspective, the Blueshirts were marching to "any old words," and even his own lyrics had metamorphosed since the start of the project. More broadly, it might demonstrate a disillusionment with the process of writing words to a particular tune (rather than just for the theoretical—and therefore far more forgiving—concept of music). Indeed, the concreteness of the tune of "O'Donnell Abú" has only restricted his writing process, and in his efforts to write and rewrite the work into something that could no longer be used by the Blueshirts, he has also had to abandon his original goal of singability; no "crowd in the street" would sing it now.

By the second publication of these songs in 1934, Yeats had successfully made it so that "no party might sing them," but his work on the poem was far from finished (*Variorum* 837). In fact, Yeats once again rewrote all three songs entirely over the course of the next few years, this time leaving significantly less of the original material intact. By December 1938, almost four years exactly after the publication in *Poetry* magazine, he had renamed the poem "Three Marching Songs," replaced every refrain from previous editions, and even altered the verses significantly; the former songs had become mere echoes in this new work.[37] Once again, these changes were accompanied by a note (although this time the note was only drafted, never sent to print): Yeats wrote, "I published a first confused version of these songs some years ago. I hope they are now clear & perhaps singable" (Finneran 45). Interestingly, Yeats seems to have

[37] In fact, in future collections of Yeats's poetry, editors debated whether to include both poems, as they were so different, or merely "Three Marching Songs," as the latter seems to have been intended to replace the former altogether (this was deduced by the fact that Yeats began "Three Marching Songs"—at the time titled "Three Revolutionary Songs"—by marking up his copy of *A Full Moon in March,* making changes directly on top of the printed "Three Songs to the Same Tune" (Finneran 45).

returned to the aspiration of singabilty in this late rewrite of the poem, despite leaving behind the titular mention of 'the tune.' His descriptor "confused" might be applied to the whole writing process; never has he quite been able to settle the way music would interact with this work.

Though Yeats is known for revising his poems—even to a fault—this poem underwent a particularly remarkable number of changes, likely due in part to the external influence of the tune and all that it entails. Mrs. Yeats even wrote to an editor in 1939, "You will see that he re-wrote (for about the ninth time) the 'Three Marching Songs'" (Finneran 44).[38] The tune, it seems, was not quite the unifying force that the poem's original title indicated—perhaps this is why he left it out of later titles. This six-year writing process might also contribute to the suggestion that Yeats's attempt at setting songs to music was a failed experiment. The tune became a burden rather than an asset, and he was never able to "finish" writing; variations appeared even after his death, as his wife incorporated various elements of his notes and his editors debated on how best to represent the poem(s). In contrast, though some view *Words for Music Perhaps* as an example of Yeats's deficiency as a musician, there was a certain strength in the quasi-musical space occupied by that work. It was rooted in the oral tradition, but it grew out of it as well; Yeats combined elements of traditional Irish song and his own poetics to create something distinct and effective. By evoking musicality without restricting the poems to any particular tune, Yeats also maintained the "impersonal" quality that was so central to the work.

More importantly, in the absence of any particular accompaniment, the poems themselves were the music; this was particularly true of *Words for Music Perhaps,* in which he incorporated elements of Irish folk song into his poetics, but he had long since written poetry with an acute awareness of its sound. As the many musicians who worked with him could attest, Yeats's

[38] Finneran wrote of Yeats receiving "attacks from several critics that his revisions were ruining his poems" (45).

distinctive melodic and rhythmic chanting of his poetry was a sort of composition in its own right. Even as a young man, "Yeats was certain that he composed to a manner of music, and in the bardic manner he had already begun to dwell on the vowels, placing strong emphasis on the rhythm, which he hummed over and over for hours in the process of composing" (Schuchard 1). Now that he has attempted to form a poem around an existing tune, though, a host of complications has arisen, from the limitations of a particular song's style, rhythms, and instrumentation to the ability that others had to take and mold it for other purposes. Yeats's revision process for "Three Songs to the Same Tune" never truly ended; he spent six years in a struggle to unite two distinctly—and perhaps incompatibly—musical entities: the tune and his lyrics.

Chapter Three: *Broadsides*

Yeats was not deterred by the experiment that was "Three Songs to the Same Tune"; he wrote to Dorothy Wellesley at the end of that same year, "I want to make another attempt to unite literature and music" (Wade 841). And make another attempt he did, as those few years prior to his death in 1939 were perhaps his most musical to date; he worked closely with vocalists on performances of his work, he recruited composers to help him create accompaniment, and he continued to grapple with the place of music in his poetry even more intensely than before.[39] In 1937, Yeats wrote five songs—this time not titled as such—and published them all in that year's *Broadsides*. The *Broadsides*, a project of the Cuala Press, were a series of limited-edition monthly publications of poetry, music, and illustrations. Through the *Broadsides* to which Yeats contributed—namely, those from 1935 and 1937—he was able to more fully realize his experimentation with music and poetry.[40] In fact, the five songs he contributed to that year's *Broadsides* all reappeared in his 1938 collection *New Poems,* all accompanied by sheet music (as they appeared in the *Broadsides*)—a first for Yeats and a stark contrast to his previous attempts at incorporating music into his poetry.

The *Broadsides* are also unique in the way in which this incorporation manifests itself. Unlike *Words for Music Perhaps* and *Three Songs to the Same Tune,* these five songs make no reference to their own musicality. However (in another striking contrast to the other two works), their appearance alongside sheet music evidences their musicality.[41] By including the music in

---

[39] He had long since collaborated with vocalists and performers; however, the introduction of BBC radio broadcasts and his own rising fame both contributed to an increase in these collaborative projects.

[40] Cuala Press released monthly *Broadsides* between 1908 and 1915, headed up by Jack Yeats. Then, after a hiatus, they resumed again in 1935 and 1937, for which W.B. Yeats became an editor. These latter *Broadsides* were published monthly, as before, but also compiled in an end-of-year volume with an introductory essay by Yeats and a co-editor.

[41] Yeats has previously only included music alongside publications of plays, which appear in the following works: *The Countess Cathleen / The Land of Heart's Desire / The Unicorn from the Stars* (1908); *Four Plays for Dancers*

print rather than simply mentioning it (like "O'Donnell Abú"), Yeats positions the music in parallel with his lyrics; both poem and tune are literary objects. Here, the music might be observed, even read—if the reader has sufficient musical knowledge—and, theoretically, Yeats's song might therefore be more easily sung. There is still one caveat, however: whereas some of the other poets appearing in the *Broadsides* wrote their lyrics twice, one set in stanzaic form and one set under the notes on the musical staffs, Yeats did not. Yeats's poems and their corresponding music existed in proximity to one another on the page, but as separate entities, leaving readers without the particular guidance of matching syllables to notes. Yeats is still a poet, not a songwriter; the poem and the tune are printed side by side, clearly related to one another, although the exact relationship between lyrics and tune is left ambiguous. This would certainly hinder singability: readers have no way of knowing exactly how to sing along to the tune, or if the tune is meant to occupy the spaces in between stanzas (as was sometimes Yeats's preference) or merely play in the background of a reading.

Though the sheet music offered little in the way of defining its role in Yeats's poetry, the poet took strides to clarify elsewhere. *Broadsides: A Collection of New Irish and English Songs,* published in full at the end of 1937, contained a short prose introduction—an essay aptly titled "Music and Poetry"—by Yeats and Dorothy Wellesley, that year's coeditor.[42] In this introduction, which relays the authors' philosophy of the relationship between song and poetry, Yeats seems to describe his own past experience setting his three songs to a tune: he asserts that "the poet, his ear attentive to his own art, hears with derision most settings of his work… And

(1921); *Plays in Prose and Verse* (1922); *Sophocles' King Oedipus: A Version for the Modern Stage* (1928); *Wheels and Butterflies* (1934).

[42] This book was simply a compilation of the periodicals of the same name, bound in book form; the same was done for the 1935 *Broadsides,* which featured an introductory piece written by Yeats and his previous co-editor F. R. Higgins titled "Anglo-Irish Ballads" (Cohen 20).

yet there are old songs that melt him into tears" ("Music and Poetry" 1). But the essay is not without hope: "Yet there must be some right balance between sound and word," it continues, mirroring Yeats's repeatedly voiced aspiration to successfully combine the two in some way ("Music and Poetry" 1). However, its conclusion seems at first contradictory to this aspiration. "There should be no accompaniment"—a startling claim in a book littered with musical transcription—"because where words are the object an accompaniment can but distract attention" ("Music and Poetry" 1).[43] It seems that Yeats and Wellesley mean something different by "accompaniment" than the presence of a tune alongside a work, as the latter is present on every page in their *Broadsides*. One must be able to have music and poetry together, and yet accompaniment—or at least a certain understanding of accompaniment—is injurious to the relationship as Yeats imagines it.

The resolution to this seeming paradox ties back to Yeats's understanding of the difference between natural, instinctive music and theory-focused, rehearsed music.[44] Here, after years of developing these ideas, the difference appears perhaps at its clearest in the context of his discussion of accompaniment:

> Sustaining notes there have been and may be again; a pause, dramatic or between verses, may admit flute or string, clapping hands, cracking fingers or whistling mouth. We reject all professional singers because no mouth trained to the modern scale can articulate poetry. We must be content with butchers and bakers and those few persons who sing from delight in words. ("Music and Poetry" 2)

[43] In Yeats's and Wellesley's own footnote on the piece, they add, "Above all no accompaniment on a keyed instrument, because by that the public ear is nailed to the mathematician's desk" ("Music and Poetry" 2).
[44] See pages 9-10.

It is formal accompaniment that Yeats rejects, just as he rejected formal education; the only permissible accompaniment is that which contributes to the natural expression of feeling, that which can be found in the everyday music of the common people. His desire for a more "natural" accompaniment perhaps even explains the lack of particular instructions on his sheet music. He provides readers with the lyrics and a tune, and it is up to their own instincts whether that tune manifests itself in a flute, a stringed instrument, or even one's whistle, underneath every stanza or between them. There can be no rigidity in the accompaniment if the music is to accomplish the same natural overflow of emotion that Yeats sought with the writing of *Words for Music Perhaps,* the emotion expressed by the type of singing that is rather more like crying out than performance.

In order to capture such natural emotion in music, one cannot regulate the music too strictly; as such, Yeats prioritizes the words and allows the tune to merely exist in conjunction with his work. While this does perhaps limit the significance of the music (Cohen notes that "most readers simply ignored the music on the page"), it allows the poetry—which has been Yeats's primary work, after all—to guide the interpretation of the tune, rather than the other way around (Cohen 23). Perhaps this is what distinguishes these late songs from "Three Songs to the Same Tune": in these *Broadsides* poems, the words take precedence over the tune, in both chronology and in importance. Whereas Yeats's "Three Songs" were written to the preexisting tune of "O'Donnell Abú," these poems were written first, and then tunes were found to accompany them. In a letter to co-editor Wellesley about the Broadsides in 1937, Yeats wrote "I may want you to get music for certain poems," indicating that tunes were this time to be procured for preexisting poems (Wade 886).

Some scholars have viewed this last decade of Yeats's life as another step in the poet's lifelong goal of improving his musicality, describing these poems as "struggling toward songhood" (Cohen 21). This characterization of the process, particularly when taking in conjunction with Yeats's earlier quasi-musical projects, creates a picture of a tragically unmusical poet spending the last years of his life in an effort to become more musical in his work. However, Yeats has not merely been attempting to improve his musicality; he has been attempting to strike a proper relation between music and poetry, one in which the poetry is the primary actor and music serves to enhance, rather than compete with, the intrinsic music of Yeats's lyrics. In fact, I argue that the five poems that appear in the 1937 *Broadsides* and the 1938 *New Poems* are Yeats's strongest work with music thus far, not because he has "improved" as a musician, but because he has found, through trial and error, a way to bring poetry and music together without sacrificing the quality of the former for the latter. If *Words for Music Perhaps* was correct in its prioritization of poetry over music (evidenced by that notorious "perhaps"), and if "Three Songs to the Same Tune" was a productive experiment insofar as it brought the theoretical tune into concrete existence, then these *Broadsides* poems might finally demonstrate a properly ordered relationship between music and words.

As with much of *Words for Music Perhaps* and "Three Songs to the Same Tune," Yeats's editing process is perhaps the greatest source of evidence for his particular views on music and poetry at any given time. Indeed, the editing process of these later poems reveals instances in which the tune must be altered—or even replaced—to suit the poem, evidence that he was not merely attempting to improve his musicality with the editing of these poems (even if that was a part of that process). For example, in May 1937, several of Yeats's new poems were performed at a dinner for the Irish Academy of Letters; following the experience, he wrote to Edmund

Dulac, a composer with whom he often partnered, "'The Curse of Cromwell' (of which I send a copy) was sung at the dinner to an Irish folk tune, but its setting was so infinitely inferior to your setting of 'The Three Bushes' that I long for a setting by you" (Wade 891). The change was made: within three months, the Irish Academy hosted a banquet that included a performance of "The Curse of Cromwell," this time, Yeats adds in parenthesis, "to Dulac's music" (Wade 895).

It is not known for sure whether Dulac's music for "The Curse of Cromwell" or the original folk tune appears in the 1937 *Broadsides,* as composer's names do not accompany particular songs. However, in the 1938 *New Poems* in which these poems and their tunes reappear, the music for "The Three Bushes" is attributed to Dulac, and the music for "The Curse of Cromwell" remains nameless, indicating that perhaps Yeats maintained the original music for publication and only used Dulac's version for performances. Likewise, Yeats's pleasure with "The Three Bushes" that night was due not primarily to the setting, but to the performance given by the singer, a man named Stephenson: "when he sang 'The Three Bushes'" Yeats wrote to Dulac, "there was not a word, not a cadence I would or could have changed" (Wade 892). Despite Yeats's self-deprecating claims of being unmusical, Schuchard notes that in rehearsals for live performances, the poet "did not hesitate to intervene impulsively to get his desired effects" (Schuchard 388). This hands-on interference is a stark contrast to the vague inclusion of sheet music alongside poetry without any specific direction; Yeats, it seems, was more invested in the moments of song as they occurred than in their appearance in print.

This priority of performance over print is altogether unsurprising, given his deep-rooted fondness for the Irish oral tradition.[45] In fact, the high points of this last decade of his career were those when his poetry could be spoken—or sung—live, embodying the immediacy and

[45] I use "performance" in its most liberal sense, referring only to the live recitation (musical or otherwise) of his poetry; Yeats, as we know, had little taste for over-professionalized performances.

spontaneity he so enjoyed. The aforementioned performance of "The Three Bushes" at the Irish Academy dinner was just such a moment: "I never saw an audience more moved," Yeats reported back to Dulac, "a good many joined in the chorus but softly and with evident feeling" (Wade 890). Thrilled with the development, he "turned the waiters out and backed against the doors to keep them from returning and interrupting the singing," so eager was he to preserve the moment (Schuchard 385). At that point in his career, he had already written numerous poems that surpassed "The Three Bushes" in reach and popularity; however, that moment of naturally occurring, unaccompanied song embodied his greatest hopes for his lyrics, as well as the philosophy of music and poetry put forth in the *Broadsides* introductory essay.

Later in 1937, Yeats made another attempt to define his ever-evolving philosophy of song and poetry to Dulac:

> All my life I have tried to get rid of modern subjectivity by insisting on construction and contemporary words and syntax. It was to force myself to this that I used to insist that all poems should be spoken (hence my plays) or sung. Unfortunately it was only about a year ago that I discovered that for sung poetry (though not for poetry chanted as Florence Farr chanted) a certain type of 'stress' was essential. (I would like to discuss this with you.) (Wade 892-893)[46]

He seems to have become slightly more musical since the alternating 'singing' and 'crying' of *Words for Music Perhaps*, leaning now more fully towards "sung poetry." He is never explicit in his correspondence about exactly how "sung poetry" is distinct from the chanted poetry of his

[46] For more on his working relationship with Florence Farr and their shared hope for a "modern revival of the minstrel tradition, see the first chapter of Schuchard's *The Last Minstrels: Yeats and the Bardic Tradition* (Schuchard 20).

past, except to say that "a certain type of 'stress' was essential."[47] I suggest that this distinction is not about one's performance of the work, but about the way he composes the poems; in fact, his manner of recitation does not seem to have changed much, if at all, from the sing-song chanting of his early days.[48] No more than a year prior to writing the letter, for example, he recited some recent poems at a dinner party, after which a guest remarked, "the sound was too lovely. He reads in a singing, chanting voice" (Schuchard 374). This description is so similar to those of his readings decades prior that we may perhaps assume that when Yeats speaks of a change in stress, he is referring primarily to the way the works are *written*, rather than the way they are performed. This will inevitably affect the performance aspect as well, but it is important to acknowledge that the change is not limited to the performance; it is present at the earliest stages of the writing process.

Indeed, these last few years of his career saw a shift in meter and rhythm in several of Yeats's lyrics (particularly those which were to be accompanied by music in the *Broadsides*). Cohen writes that in these years, Yeats "developed verse rhythms which worked with, rather than against, simple musical rhythms" (Cohen 15). This was more than merely reworking a poem to suit a particular tune: Yeats began honing a new subgenre of his poetry, replacing metrical complexity with a rhythmic structure that lent itself more intuitively to singing. "The Three Bushes," for example, utilizes alternating lines of iambic tetrameter and trimeter (fittingly called "common meter"); one needed only to read the first two lines to recognize the familiar rhythm of countless traditional ballads. "Come Gather Round Me Parnellites" utilizes the same meter as

[47] The fact that Yeats viewed stress as the distinguishing factor between spoken and sung poetry—rather than, say, a melody—is further confirmation that his goal was musical poetry, not music for music's sake.
[48] Chapter one of Schuchard's *The Last Minstrels* also provides many more details about the tradition of poets who gathered and chanted their poetry aloud.

"The Three Bushes," though only after some revision.[49] An early draft began, "**Come** all **old** **Par**nell**ites** / And **praise** our **cho**sen **man**"; this eventually became "Come **gath**er **round** me **Par**nell**ites** / And **praise** our **cho**sen **man**" (Mays and Parrish, *New Poems* 189, 191; my bolding). Likewise, "Soon we **lie where** he **lies** / That **lies un**der **ground**" became "For **soon** we **lie** where **he** is **laid** / And **he** is **un**der**ground**" (Mays and Parrish, *New Poems* 187, 191; my bolding). These metrical tweaks appeared in the same draft in which the title of the song's accompanying tune was named, leading some scholars to assume that the poem was edited for the tune's sake.[50] However, the consistency between the meters of several of these late poems indicates a shift towards simple ballad structures in this subset of his poems, rather than individual tailoring for the tune.

As Yeats says to Dulac, this latest focus on "a certain type of 'stress'" is part of a much longer attempt "to get rid of modern subjectivity" (Wade 892). This goal is reminiscent of his earlier desire, stated at the start of the writing process of *Words for Music Perhaps*, to create work that was "all emotional and all impersonal." The "impersonal" (as we understand it in the context of Irish oral tradition) is the antithesis to subjectivity, as it orients itself instead towards a collective Irish audience, towards "national traditions not hidden in libraries, but living in the minds of the populace" (*Uncollected Prose* 147).[51] This "impersonal" (or communal) orientation was, for Yeats, inexplicably linked with the orality of Ireland's poetry; throughout his career, he was "committed to reversing the modern shift of poetry from the ear to the eye; it was essential to his vision of cultural revival in Ireland" (Schuchard 14). In 1937, having wrestled with spoken

[49] "The Three Bushes" was originally drafted with this meter; all revisions throughout the writing process were made within its parameters.
[50] This is the poem Cohen described as "struggling towards songhood" (Cohen 21).
[51] His preference for the impersonal was not limited to an Irish collective; it was also a broader resistance to the aforementioned "modern subjectivity" (Wade 892). However, in the context of his admiration for the Irish oral tradition, his writing is a vessel for a specifically Irish communal experience.

and sung poetry in different settings for decades, he feels that he has, at least in part, accomplished his goal.[52] He continues in his letter to Dulac on the subject, "It was by mastering this 'stress' that I have written my more recent poems which have I think, for me, a new poignancy" (Wade 893). If the rejection of modern subjectivity encompasses his "all impersonal" goal for writing *Words for Music Perhaps*, then perhaps the "new poignancy" achieved by this new manner of writing encompasses the "all emotional." By writing in this new manner, with music and performance in mind (yet without letting a particular tune direct the writing of the poems themselves), Yeats has gotten closer than ever before to his original goals for poetry and song.

Still, however, the music does not take precedence over the poetry. In the late 1930s (perhaps in part due to his experiment with "Three Songs to the Same Tune"), Yeats was acutely aware of the symbiotic relationship between music and poetry. "I want to get back to simplicity," he continues in his letter to Dulac, "and can best do it—I believe—by writing for our Irish unaccompanied singing. Every change I make to help the singer seems to improve the poems" (Wade 893). This preference for "Irish unaccompanied singing" was, of course, one of the primary focuses of "Music and Poetry" (the introductory essay for the 1937 *Broadsides*), which he refers to elsewhere in this letter as his "manifesto" (Wade 893). That essay—as we saw earlier in this chapter—advocated for the simplest accompaniment possible, to allow for the natural expression of emotion he so hoped to inspire with his lyrics. Yeats also comments on the unique process of collaborating with performers of one's own poetry; he notes that his efforts to improve performance somehow impact the poems themselves. Given that his attentions are

[52] In regard to the "cultural revival in Ireland," Yeats was never content; however, he made great strides towards establishing a proper relationship between music and poetry, as well as achieving a certain style of poetry that counters modernism's tendency toward subjectivity.

toward the ear rather than the eye, it is fitting that even after the drafting and revisions are done, the poem can still be formed and changed by the element of performance. In fact, the music of the performances was appealing to him primarily insofar as it supported the poetry: Victor Clinton Clinton-Baddeley, one of Yeats's musical collaborators, wrote that "he was not so interested in the art of song as in the art of the public presentation of poetry. He earnestly desired music, but solely as a support to the right speaking of verse" (qtd. in Schuchard 378).

True to his aims, the last few years of his career were rich with the speaking and singing of his poetry. In February 1937, he wrote to Ethel Mannin, "These ballads of mine though not supremely good are not ephemeral, the young will sing them now and after I am dead," although in reality, few—if any—of these songs were sung long after his death (Wade 881). Yeats's son, Michael Yeats, wrote that "Gather Round Me Parnellites" was "the only ballad of his which may still be heard occasionally at a convivial gathering, sung not because it was Yeats who wrote it, but because it was a good song, and someone felt moved to sing it"; however, even that song has faded in popularity, overshadowed by countless other Yeats poems (M. Yeats 178). Despite Yeats's declaration that these ballads were not ephemeral, they were, by nature of the live performances—planned and spontaneous alike—perhaps the most ephemeral of all of his work. As Yeats turned his attention to the oral, rather than the visual, he brought his work into a performance space that only exists as long as its performers—of which Yeats was the head—were alive and participating.

But despite Yeats's hope for longevity, this ephemerality is far from a failure: in those moments when he heard his poetry sung, and particularly those unplanned performances by untrained singers, he achieved the pinnacle of the natural expression of emotion through song. Although these late songs never gained the traction of the ancient Irish legends passed down by

the old bardic tradition, Yeats was nevertheless able to contribute to a type of poetry that simply could not exist on the page alone. Though he had no way of knowing how these songs would fare after his time, he ultimately seemed to find contentment regarding his poetry and music: at the end of 1938, he hoped to write "a small book dealing with the relations between speech and song" (Wade 919). Yeats died just over a month later, and he never pursued this project. However, in the absence of this book, other evidence from this last decade of his life—his letters, his drafts, his publications, and his collaborations—point towards the poet's growing understanding that in order for music to collaborate with poetry without compromising it, the artist's formula must be music for words, not words for music.

Coda

The tunes that accompanied Yeats's late lyrics were almost invariably folk songs. This was not because its regular rhymes and structures aligned most closely with his own; indeed, the internal music of his work was much more subtle, complex, and inventive than the musical genre to which he was so often drawn. Cohen suggests that "for Yeats, at any rate, the chief attraction of folk music…seems to have been his belief that, 'To the country singer the words are more important than the music….' This ratio was perfectly suited to his purposes" (Cohen 20). And while the 'ratio,' as Cohen calls it, does align with the relationship between music and poetry eventually accomplished in the *Broadsides,* the image of the "country singer" (in contrast with the ever-disparaged formally trained singer) perhaps also plays a role in Yeats's preference for folk tunes. After all, it is the emotion of the common people, "butchers and bakers and those few persons who sing from delight in words," that Yeats has been attempting to harness in his late songs ("Music and Poetry" 2). For the common people—the primary participants in folk song—the prioritization of words over music is not a methodical decision; rather, it is the natural overflow of emotion.

From the beginning of the 1930s, Yeats was confident in the "all emotional and all impersonal" quality he wanted to evoke in his musical poetry. He took on the role of a modern bard in *Words for Music Perhaps*, dealing in various personas and stock characters to accomplish the 'impersonal' and expressing the 'emotional' through passionate utterances that were half cry, half song. And though this work was geared toward the (Irish) collective in its approach, Yeats maintained the swerves and subversions of his own writing style; he evoked the bardic tradition while staying rooted in his modern poetics. However, whether one considers the perpetual absence of accompaniment a disappointment or a deliberate choice on Yeats's part, the fact

remains that as far as music goes, *Words for Music Perhaps* never quite met its original goal. This is perhaps yet another reason that the work was an evocation of the Irish folk tradition, rather than a true part of it; the poems never quite accomplished the extrinsic musicality that "some crowd in the street might understand and sing" (*Variorum* 543). "Three Songs to the Same Tune" certainly resolved this problem, as the selection of the tune of "O'Donnell Abú" preceded the entire writing process. As Paterson writes, "Yeats had long since argued that melody was not to be imposed upon the words from above but derived from within"; however, "O'Donnell Abú" did prove to be an imposition, and the poem suffered as a result ("Temporary Ideas" 108).

But Yeats was careful not to repeat the error in producing the *Broadsides*. Instead, the poems existed first and foremost as independent entities, and compatible music was either found or created.[53] However, these poems were not entirely unchanged by the corresponding music, or they might have borne more of a resemblance to *Words for Music Perhaps.* Rather, Yeats leaned into a structure that was well-suited to folk song, mimicking some of its conventions so that it became a generic fit without insisting that the poems align perfectly with the rhythms and tones of a particular melody. Poetry could therefore coexist and even collaborate with musical accompaniment without the strict compatibility required of words set to music in the traditional manner.[54] The separation of the lyrics and the sheet music in the *Broadsides* also allowed for a freedom which, in a sense, made the songs more singable: the lyrics might theoretically be chanted or sung in any manner and at any point in the music. Accompaniment thus primarily served as a contributor to the tone and feeling of the piece; this was a useful role for it to play, as

[53] In both the 1935 and the 1937 *Broadsides,* some songs are attributed to composers with whom the editors collaborated (such as Dulac), whereas others are simply labeled "Traditional"—these were sourced melodies.
[54] "The best texts for music are the simplest," composer Martin Boykan wrote, due to the restrictions of music's own tempos, structures, and stresses (qtd. in Ramazani 189). And though these poems were simpler than many of Yeats's other works, the degree of separation between poem and tune allowed him more flexibility than if his words had to correspond to notes.

it was the emotion of folk song that had always been primary in Yeats's understanding of the tradition.

The *Broadsides* poems were, in a sense, the result of several years of trial and error; however, the process of setting them to music was one of trial and error in its own right. Even after they were published alongside music, Yeats did not hesitate to adjust aspects of performance or, in more extreme cases, replace the accompanying music altogether.[55] Though later publications of the works (namely, the 1938 collection *New Poems*) left the poems and their accompanying tunes mostly unchanged, the relationship between song and words was a living, evolving entity during Yeats's final years. The incorporation of music into poetry certainly adds another dimension to the work, one that is primarily—if not exclusively—experienced orally.[56] It is in this quality of oral experience that we most clearly see, despite Yeats's various musical obstacles, the reason for his inclination toward accompaniment. "By all accounts," Paterson relays, "Yeats's poetry was conditioned by its peculiar vocal genesis…a cadence and patterning that might or might not survive the printed page…performance rather than reading seemed to best manifest its existence" ("Temporary Ideas" 102). It is fitting, therefore, that these poems only reached their final form through performance (if 'final' is even an appropriate term for the ephemeral experience of live performance).

Indeed, it was only through performance that Yeats was truly able to take part in Irish oral tradition, lifting the songs off the page and bringing them into the realm of orality. "Yeats [was] convinced that the Irish are oral people who believe in the magic of the spoken or chanted word," and the successful moments of performance were as powerful—and, unfortunately for

[55] See the replacement of the music for "The Three Bushes" on pages 36-37.
[56] After all, given Cohen's assertion that most readers simply ignored the music on the page, most experiences of the music would likely have occurred during Yeats's lifetime, in the performances he arranged.

Yeats, as uncommon—as magic (Farag 10). "Successful" is, of course, a subjective distinction, though I argue that a successful performance for Yeats was one that encompassed the natural overflow of emotion in a collective Irish experience (the "all emotional and all impersonal" he described in his letter to Shakespear in 1929). Such performances were difficult to come by; after all, it is nearly impossible to manufacture what is meant to be 'natural,' and to have a truly collective experience requires the cooperation of a present and participating crowd. Of one 1937 performance, lively in person but poorly translated to wireless broadcast, Yeats wrote: "Songs at the Abbey itself [were] a success—three curtains and so on…[with] people in the wings clapping their hands. It was very stirring—on the wireless it was a school-boy knocking with the end of a pen-knife, or a spoon" (qtd. in Schuchard 377). There was something untranslatable about the shared experience in the Abbey Theatre, so much so that the recording was a comparative failure in Yeats's eyes.

Live performances such as this one were truly collective experiences in a way that no recording—or even print publication—could be. Of course, print was still Yeats's primary medium, and his most well-known poems during this decade were not these songs at all, but other works not tailored for oral performance.[57] However, in the context of Yeats's desire to revive the Irish oral tradition through the incorporation of musical accompaniment, his greatest successes in this final decade—as well as his greatest moments of joy—were in these collective experiences of poetry, when crowds would clap or chant or sing along. In fact, his hopes for these works might be best exemplified by the aforementioned spontaneous performance of "The Three Bushes" at the meeting of the Irish Academy, in which the audience, moved by poetry and supported by music, spontaneously "joined in the chorus…with evident feeling" (Wade 890).

[57] "Lapis Lazuli," to name one example, appeared in the 1938 *Late Poems* alongside the *Broadsides* poems; it was less suited for music, but still more widely known by readers today.

This moment was free of coordination, rehearsal, and technique, as naturally occurring and collective as Yeats could have hoped for. Its ephemerality made it all the more precious, as evidenced by Yeats's attempt to block off all entrances to the room in order to preserve the magic of this moment of oral performance. Performances such as these were the fulfillment of his small part in the long bardic tradition, and they created an avenue of expression and connection to Irish culture that is largely inaccessible by the written word alone. Music, then, was not merely an expression of the emotion Yeats hoped to evoke in his work; it was also a way to bring the poetry into the realm of speaking and singing, where it might take on the magic of the Irish oral tradition.

Yeats's work during this last decade of his career did not eradicate the ongoing tension between music and poetry. The forms' shared attention to rhythm and sound in particular creates both consonance and dissonance between them, simultaneously encouraging fusion and resisting it. Yeats, though keenly aware of and occasionally frustrated by this dissonance, did not shy away from attempting to merge the two forms. In the end, he found a way forward, one which required a generic shift on his part and a more liberal understanding of how accompaniment might engage with poetry. Though his poetry and its musical accompaniment both took on slightly different forms than those he might have imagined at the start of the decade, he was crucially able to highlight the emotional and impersonal resonances between his poetry and folk song and engage with the oral tradition that inspired him. The categories of music and poetry are too broad and too multifaceted to reconcile them (or declare them irreconcilable) without nuance. Rather, the relationship between the two forms is an ever-changing one, and, as Yeats's late songs demonstrate, all one can do is strike them against one another in different ways, testing their frictions and finding new affinities.

Works Cited

"Abú, in." *Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla,* edited by Niall Ó Dónaill. 1977. https://www.teanglann.ie/en/fgb/ab%c3%ba

Clark, David, editor. *Parnell's Funeral and Other Poems from a Full Moon in March: Manuscript Materials.* Cornell University Press, 2003.

---. *Words for Music Perhaps and Other Poems: Manuscript Materials.* Cornell University Press, 1999.

Cohen, Paul. "Words for Music: Yeats's Late Songs." *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, vol. 10, no. 2, 1984, pp. 15–26. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/25512604.

"Éire, n." *Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla,* edited by Niall Ó Dónaill. 1977. https://www.teanglann.ie/en/fgb/%c3%89ire

Farag, Fahmy. "Forcing Reading and Writing on Those Who Want Neither: W. B. Yeats and the Irish Oral Tradition." *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies,* vol. 11, no. 2, 1985, pp. 7–15. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/25512634.

Finneran, Richard J. "*A Full Moon in March* and *New Poems*." *Editing Yeats's Poems.* Macmillan Press, 1983, pp. 43-63.

Flood, Grattan. "Joseph Halliday: Inventor of the Royal Kent Bugle." *Musical Opinion*, vol. 42, no. 500, May 1919, pp. 501-502.

Frayne, John and Colton Johnson, editors. *Uncollected Prose by W. B. Yeats*, vol. 1, Macmillan, 1975.

Jeffares, A. Norman. *W. B. Yeats: A New Biography*, Bloomsbury Publishing Place, 2001.

Mays, J. C. C. and Stephen Parrish, editors. *New Poems: Manuscript Materials.* Cornell University Press, 2000.

McCann, Michael James. “The Clan Connell War Song” [renamed “O’Donnell Abú”]. *The Nation*, Jan. 1843. https://www.irishnewsarchive.com/the-nation-newspaper-archive

Mong, Ambrose Ih-Ren. “Yeats and the Bardic Tradition.” *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, vol. 20, no. 1, 1994, pp. 89–101. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/25512989.

Paterson, Adrian. “‘Music Will Keep Out Temporary Ideas’: W. B. Yeats's Radio Performances.” *Word and Music Studies*, vol. 12, 2011, pp. 101-120.

---. “*Words for Music Perhaps*: W. B. Yeats, Music, and Meaninglessness.” *Essays on Music and Language in Modernist Literature.* Edited by Katherine O’Callaghan, Routledge, 14 Aug. 2020, pp. 140-156.

---. “Yeats and Crazy Jane: *Words for Music Perhaps.*” *The Marriage Between Literature and Music.* Edited by Nick Ceramella, Cambridge Scholars Press, 2022, pp. 99-127.

Saddlemyer, Ann. *Becoming George: The Life of Mrs. W.B. Yeats*. Oxford University Press, 2002.

Schuchard, Ronald. *The Last Minstrels: Yeats and the Revival of the Bardic Arts.* Oxford University Press, 2008.

Wade, Alan, editor. *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*. Octagon Books, 1955.

Yeats, Michael. "W. B. Yeats and Irish Folk Song," *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, no. 20, June 1966, pp. 153-178.

Yeats, W. B. “An Introduction for my Plays.” *Essays and Introductions.* Macmillan, 1961, pp. 527-530.

---. *Autobiographies*. Edited by William O’Donnell et al., Scribner, 1999.

---. *On the Boiler.* Cuala Press, 1938.

---. “Speaking to the Psaltery.” *Essays and Introductions.* Macmillan, 1961, pp. 13-27.

---. “The Symbolism of Poetry.” *Essays and Introductions.* Macmillan, 1961, pp. 153-164.

---. “Three Songs to the Same Tune.” *Poetry,* vol. 45, no. 3, Dec. 1934, pp. 127-134. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20579736

---. “Three Songs to the Same Tune.” *The Spectator,* 23 Feb. 1934, p. 20. https://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/23rd-february-1934/20/three-songs-to-the-same-tune

---. *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats.* Edited by Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach, Macmillan, 1957.

---. *Words for Music Perhaps and Other Poems.* Cuala Press, 1932.

Yeats, W. B. and Dorothy Wellesley, editors. *Broadsides: A Collection of New Irish and English Songs.* Cuala Press, 1937.