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# Beyond Fascism: W.B. Yeats's A Vision and the Complexities of His Authoritarian Politics

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Beyond Fascism: W.B. Yeats's *A Vision* and the Complexities of His Authoritarian Politics

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A Thesis

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Cheney, Washington

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts in Literature

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By

Justin Abel

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THESIS OF JUSTIN ABEL APPROVED BY

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## MASTER'S THESIS

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Nobel Prize laureate William Butler Yeats was an Anglo-Irish poet, playwright, impresario, and statesman. It is primarily his late poetry that lends him his posthumous reputation (Foster). Among the celebrated authors of the last century he is a formidable person. Throughout his adult life, Yeats had consistently engaged in national leadership during a troubled time of Irish liberation movements. Such individuals influence a generation, so Yeats's link to Fascism and the question of his effect on a world that erupted upon a second Great War is an important one, debated by critics. The system theorized by Yeats in *A Vision*, published first in 1925, was central to his ideologies. Through his system of the Antithetical and Primary, he identified significantly with ideas and movements classifiable as Fascist, but his system itself contains notions that restrict full association with the Fascist political movement.

His association with Fascism has generated academic discourse focused on his culpability in supporting the burgeoning totalitarian movements of his time, but the question, or accusation, of his Fascism has eluded a definite diagnosis. Unlike his friend and fellow poet Ezra Pound, whom he addresses in a beginning section of *A Vision* titled "A Packet for Ezra Pound," Yeats did not fully embrace Fascism (2). My research suggests Yeats never officially identified himself as a Fascist though he indeed aligned himself with Fascists and with Fascism from the beginning of the political movement until late in his life. Fascism can be defined as aggressive right-wing nationalism that was attentive to modernization and employed mythologizing tactics of propaganda under the hierarchical rule of a dynamic leader like Mussolini or Hitler. Effective Fascist movements tended to an environment of enforced conformity. Whether by rhetorical means or intimidation, Fascism is notorious for efforts to mold the populace in the direction of ex-

tremist devotion to the state. Although Yeats was initially drawn to Fascism, he realized that his Antithetical ideal of nationalism was incompatible with Fascist nationalism.

*A Vision* prescribes a theory of recurrence that sways history and the human condition. History and every individual are subject to a cycle between what Yeats terms the lunar Antithetical and the solar Primary tinctures. The connotations evoked by Yeats's use of the terms solar and Primary are important. Solar represents civic life and the public reality of such things as commerce and interaction with others. This symbolism of daytime is the essence of the Primary. Lunar evokes nighttime, the ambiance of dreaming, the imagination, and passion. This reality is Antithetical. Also, the lunar and solar labels illustrate by symbolism a counter but systematic relationship of movement like the moon and sun. The so-called Primary and Antithetical "tinctures" are linked in relationship with each other, and they are often represented by geometric symbols such as dual cones or interwoven gyres. The shapes are useful to describe the expanding and contracting nature of the tinctures as dual states of being because as one tincture expands the other diminishes in influence. Both civilization, and each individual's soul as it is consistently reborn in a new body, cycle through 28 phases that Yeats diagramed as a wheel. So, these symbols represented what Yeats called "stylistic arrangements of experience" (*A Vision* 25). In this cyclical process, one tincture increases to dominate the character of the era or person until the other tincture almost completely disappears from influence. Then, the system reverses as the lesser tincture begins to expand, and this cycle goes on perpetually.

On history's stage, Yeats felt an Antithetical "influx" or "dispensation" was about to occur with the millennium and civilization would take on the character of the Antithetical. The Primary dispensation happened two thousand years prior, and Yeats provided

the Christian symbolism of Mary and the Dove where the Antithetical dispensation that proceeded the Christian epoch was represented by the symbolism of Leda and the Swan (267-302). The virginal and peaceful connotations of the Christian symbolism contrast with the sensual and bellicose connotations of the bronze era symbolism. Yeats wrote in *A Vision*, “after [a Primary] age of necessity, truth, goodness, mechanism, science, democracy, abstraction, peace, comes an [Antithetical] age of freedom, fiction, evil, kindred, art, aristocracy, peculiarity, war (52). The differences between the Antithetical and Primary are important to comprehend.

The bundled adjectives Yeats uses to describe the Primary show the world as he saw it. He believed civilization was in a decadent stage dominated by Judeo-Christian morality, and democratic civilization would give way to the more Machiavellian manifestation of the Antithetical age. Specifically, the Primary represented what he considered to be an “objective” identity (72). This means a Primary era or personality is not self-centered, but attentive to the concerns of the mass and things outside of the subjective experience. The Primary was moral, focused on the external, and it centered on unity. So, religion for example, is primary because a population unifies in its focus on a divinity external to the individual self. Yeats envisioned the Primary as “democratic,” which leveled people out on a cultural and socioeconomic plane. The will of the people is principal to a Primary disposition. This is important because the Antithetical is “aristocratic,” and Yeats strongly related to and favored the Antithetical tincture.

Yeats was of an Anglo-Irish family, and as a member of the privileged social class of Protestant Ascendancy he believed this upper-class was obligated to a responsibility to preserve and uphold Ireland’s culture (Allison 185). Though his ancestry was

English, he embraced his Irish national heritage, and was a patriotic nationalist who served two terms in Irish Senate (Howes 14). He supported the Free State party of William T. Cosgrave over the Irish-Catholic strain of nationalism represented by the Fianna Fáil Republican Party of Éamon De Valera (Stanfield 15). Yeats, in admiration for “intensity,” compared De Valera to Mussolini and Hitler (Stanfield 20). Despite this admiration, Stanfield claims that Yeats did not agree with De Valera’s democratic and “wholehearted identification with the masses...his assumption that what the masses willed was rightly and necessarily the nation’s destiny” (11). This conflicting admiration and disagreement illustrate separately Yeats’s interest in authoritarian leadership and his enmity toward democratic ideals. His political resolve is not restricted to his legacy of affluence; Yeats’s political identification is pertinent to the system of *A Vision*.

Paul Scott Stanfield elaborates on a statement by Yeats to claim the poet believed “the Protestant patriot [suspended between English and Irish loyalties] ‘Gave though free to refuse’” (*A Vision* 51). This self-motivated choice to govern is Antithetical. Yeats continues, “Great and honorable things came of the Primary cast of mind: philanthropy, sanctity, martyrdom. The best government, however, came from men of an Antithetical cast of mind...” (51). Yeats may have overvalued his party by attributing a perceived heroism of self-motivated action to its blue-blooded and Protestant partisans, and this demonstrates his identification with the Antithetical cast of mind. To characterize self-originated action that sought not the appeasement of others as its chief end, Stanfield quotes “The Tower:” ‘Bound neither to cause nor to State / Neither to slaves that were spat on, / Nor to the tyrant that spat’ (51). This self-governing willfulness illustrates Yeats’s interest in Hitler and Mussolini. Yeats idealized his own political persuasion as



Antithetical. Yeats's politics were Antithetical because he considered his own identification with the Irish nation as a dignified act of self-inspired choice due to the fact that he could have just as easily identified with England by his Anglo-Irish birth.

Self-inspired action is central to the Antithetical because Yeats considered it the main element of a "subjective" identity (71). The Antithetical is defined by individual expression, and it is associated with 'art,' so it is aesthetic and emotional. It is the tincture of "...our inner world of desire and imagination" (73). This aesthetic character gives the Antithetical atmosphere or personality a theatrical flair, and there is potential for dramatic tragedy in an aesthetic response to self-inspired action. For example, if the subjective efforts of an artist or aristocrat are met with serious disaster such an Antithetical individual may take on a tragic character akin to Oedipus or Hamlet. Antithetical figures exert effort toward private passions that may hold potential for their own doom, and this aesthetic response to life illustrates Yeats's theory of The Will and The Mask. The Mask is the object, or ideal persona, toward which the Antithetical "Will" is exerted; Yeats claims an Antithetical individual "...follows whim's most difficult / Among whims not impossible..." (60). This subjective passion may take the form of art, leadership, or a number of things, and it is a self-imposed discipline that does not conform to or respect the desires of the multitude. The desire of the Antithetical to impose subjective will upon the external creates potential for tyranny.

Yeats's later poetry which is frequently ominous and apocalyptic provides evidence for ideological and aesthetic links to Fascism, but it is a superficial interpretation for a reader to commit to this analysis without an understanding of the doctrines of *A Vision*. The literature review provides an extended synthesis to define Fascism, an analysis

of how Yeats's theoretical system relates to Fascism, and it addresses his practical involvement with the political movement. Following the literature review is a rhetorical analysis of *A Vision*. This provides Yeats's basic theory of the relationship and difference between Primary and Antithetical, with the influence they have over an individual and the influence of the tinctures as historical influx. The rhetorical analysis also examines the means of persuasion Yeats uses to declare his philosophy.

Functioning substantially as a manifesto or creed, *A Vision* delivers the theoretical assertions of tinctures that complicate Yeats's interest in Fascism. So, an examination of his theory sheds light on Yeats's support of Fascism, but it in turn suggests why he did not at last commit to the ideology. The central point of contrast with Fascism is the Antithetical tincture, or state of being, that Yeats favored and anticipated. I argue that the principle likeness between Fascist states and the Antithetical tincture Yeats constructed is authoritarianism. However, the vital dissimilarity between Fascism and the Antithetical tincture is that the Antithetical provided opportunity for individuation and Fascism fostered conformity. The dissimilarity between Fascism and Yeats's Antithetical ideal is evident in the cultural and aesthetic platforms used as a means to promote nationalism.

In "Contrasts between Cultural and Aesthetic Energies of the Fascist and the Antithetical Nation," I argue that the cultural and aesthetic environment of Fascist states ultimately contrasts Yeats's Antithetical ideal. I argue that Yeats's political identification with the Protestant Ascendancy shows the emphasis of aristocracy in his ideal Antithetical tincture, and after the death of the ideal Antithetical statesman Charles Stewart Parnell, Yeats participated in efforts to begin an Irish aesthetic and cultural revival. Yeats's aesthetic and cultural approach to nationalism parallels Fascist efforts on one level. How-

ever, on a deeper level the two forms of nationalism are incompatible. Consequently, I argue that the Fascist philosophical approach to the creation of an aesthetic and cultural milieu resembles the Primary tincture. The Fascist approach is centered on conformity, which is not Antithetical because the Fascist aesthetic and cultural program does not uphold the individuality inherent to an Antithetical condition. Notions of individual expression and expurgation are relevant here. I argue the Fascist hostility toward authentic art through censorship and inauthentic aesthetics promoted conventionality and conformity. Thus, Yeats, the individualistic and transgressive Antithetical artist, would reject the Fascist aesthetic program for its conformity. Warrior mentality and heroic discipline is also a significant topic to illustrate the incompatibility of Fascist nationalism with the Antithetical ideal.

In “Love War’ Contrasts between the Ideals of Yeatsian and Fascist Heroism. I show a contrast between a Fascist warrior and Yeatsian hero,” I argue the relevance of violence and war to both Yeats’s system and Fascism. The solitary and subjective nature of the Antithetical warrior does not fit in with the “levelling” spirit of Fascist efforts to condition warriors to abandon their selfhood to the service of the state. Fascist nationalism failed to represent the unrestricted selfhood of an Antithetical warrior. This idea of selfhood, or individual identity, that I argue as present in the Yeatsian hero is also relevant to understand how Fascist nationalism cannot lead to a full manifestation of an Antithetical reality.

I argue in “Contrasts between Yeats’s Ideal Antithetical Commonwealth and the Fascist Social Reality” that Yeats’s ideal Antithetical commonwealth illustrates the poet’s particular emphasis on class stratification, and I explore the differences between Yeats’s

ideal and an actual Fascist populace. I argue that Yeats believed fixed class situations were integral to an Antithetical national character. In an Antithetical commonwealth, the few who ruled pursued individuation and personal excellence while the peasantry embraced a folk identity that was equally essential to civilization as aristocracy. This antithetical folk identity and the cultivated excellence of the aristocracy provide a particular humanity that contrasts with the conformity of Fascist popular nationalism.

Finally, in “Contrasts between the Aristocratic Rule of the Antithetical and the Leadership of the Fascist State,” I claim that Fascist elitism contrasts with Yeats’s Antithetical idea of dynasty. I argue that the merit of the elite individual in Fascism, exemplified, for example, by the Fascist *Führerprinzip* philosophy of a strong leader, fascinated Yeats. But, the oligarchical rule he favored was one of aristocratic inheritance. So, Fascist hero worship of a leader proves to be a Primary devotion to something external and powerful that exists outside of the individual self. I also argue that there is an important contrast of intention between Yeats’s and the Fascists’ support of eugenics as a mechanism for national purity. Yeats’s desire for intentional breeding to strengthen a pure-blooded aristocratic stock is authoritarian, but it is disconnected from the Nazi racial purity that is connotative of Fascism. I illustrate how Yeats’s occult notion of an Antithetical avatar is so arcane that it goes beyond the practical expression of Fascist government. Yeats’s nationalism was also fanciful to the degree that he held an occult belief in the birth of an Irish avatar. In this subjective conception, he held the notion this avatar would be his son. Yeats, therefore, did not see Mussolini or Hitler as prospective avatar figures.

Aristocratic leadership is an essential quality of the Antithetical, and Yeats’s emphasis on aristocratic elitism illustrates how his authoritarian ideal lends present rele-

vance to his work, and I ultimately propose that Yeats's work is especially relevant in context of our own times. The apocalyptic and despotic landscapes Yeats creates in his art resound in our post-millennial era as we confront the entropy of democratic civilization.

## Describing Fascism and Yeats: A Literature Review

Fascism is a notoriously difficult term to pin down. A precise definition is beyond reach as the most dynamic expressions of Fascism have been as eccentric as its central personalities. Although the generic term "Fascist" is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as "a person of right-wing authoritarian views. Hence as adj., of, pertaining to, or characteristic of Fascism or Fascists," this definition is insufficient (OED). Fascism is a complex political movement that demands a thorough definition. The chief models of Fascism are the paradigmatic *Partito Nazionale Fascista*, created by Benito Mussolini in 1919 and the maximum expression of the movement advanced by Adolph Hitler's *Nationalsozialismus*, or Nazi Party (*Fascism* 198, Paxton 206). The term "right-wing" is difficult because where Fascism qualifies as the radical right it also opposed conservatism. Staley G. Payne illustrates in his book *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945* that Fascist governments expressed this anticonservatism through the enterprise of accelerating aspects of modernization (486). The notion of a "law-and-order...far right" fits the model of discipline innate to Italian and German Fascism, but the dually progressive nature of the movement is essential to approaching a suitable definition of the movement (Laqueur 8). Fascism rested upon the political right, but not with its entire weight. The Fascist response to modernity can be understood in context of the concept of palingenesis.

Payne cites Roger Griffin's definition of Fascism: "a genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist-ultra nationalism"...Fascist ideology was certainly 'palingenetic'; that is, it emphasized above all the rebirth of the national spirit, Culture, and society" (*History of Fascism* 5). And, as Griffin points out, the "mythic" nature and ultranationalism of the movement are important to illustrate the "heady palingenetic fervor" of the Fascist state (129). Fascist administrations of the early twentieth century mythologized ethnic destiny and revolution, and they used paradoxical appeals to paganism and past glory with secularism, newness, and advancement (Laqueur 69, *Fascism* 10). Aesthetic and cultural norming through philosophy, propaganda, censorship, anti-intellectualism, and calculated art were used as sociopolitical levelling agents intended to create a unified folk-identity (Charny 91-96, De Grand 68-70, 72, Paxton 12, 18, 79-80). Populism was a core element of Fascism in both Axis regimes.

Hitler and Mussolini sought to transcend class tensions through intensifying an all-encompassing nationalistic fervor (De Grand 58, Chadwick 888, Laqueur 8, 20). In *The Anatomy of Fascism*, Robert O. Paxton uses the analogy of political religion to describe how Fascist nationalism "mobilized believers around sacred rites and words, excited them to self-denying fervor, and preached a revealed truth that admitted no dissidence (213). In "Fascism and Religion: The Metaxas Regime in Greece and the 'Third Hellenic Civilization'. Some Theoretical Observations on 'Fascism', 'Political Religion' and 'Clerical Fascism,'" Aristotle Kallis cited "Fascism -as-political religion" to be a significant element of what "destabilized traditional moral and social constraints, [which] often provoked psychological gaps, disorientation, and a craving for a new, transcendental or-

der” (231). Correspondingly, Paxton shows the herd mentality of Fascism by illustrating that Mussolini sought to represent this mass solidarity through the vanguard image of the *fasci*, which is a bound sheaf to represent strength in numbers, and in it is implanted an axe-head (5). This axe-head provides an image of the strong leader associated with the movement.

The Fascist “cult of leadership” presents a hierarchical government under the colossal personality of an ultimate leader which Paxton exemplifies as Il Duce and Das Führer (De Grand 76, Fascism 13-14).

Fascism rested not upon the truth of its doctrine but upon the leaders’ mystical union with the historic destiny of his people, a notion related to romanticist ideas of national historic flowering and of individual artistic or spiritual genius, though Fascism otherwise denied romanticism’s exaltation of unfettered personal creativity (17)

Fascist leaders postured themselves as above reproach or beyond even accountability to consensus. According to pro-Fascist intellectuals, “genius and success in politics could not be measured by normal ethical (and aesthetic) standards” (Laqueur 20). Dynamic Fascist leaders present themselves with aggression, consequently violence also was integral to the movement during its rise.

Internally, the early exaltation of political aggression is evident in street fights and assassinations between Mussolini’s Blackshirts and Italian Socialists in Milan in addition to Munich’s *Bierkeller Putsch*, the failed upheaval for which Hitler was charged with treason (*History of Fascism* 99, 155-56). Externally, Fascism also held aggressive foreign policies of expansionism. Mussolini’s argument for vital habitat and Hitler’s concept of

*lebensraum* and were justifications for the invasion of Ethiopia and neighboring European countries (Soucy 6). Aggression meant vitality, and this glorification of aggression and vitality naturally proceeded to violence and war.

George Orwell and W.J. McCormack provide a significant argument that Yeats was a Fascist. Orwell states that Yeats is effectively a Fascist due to his “fascistic tendency,” and Orwell takes issue with the occult nature of *A Vision* and Yeats’s snobbery as manifestations of this Fascist penchant. McCormack in “Yeats’s Politics Since 1943: Approaches and Reproaches,” refutes claims that Yeats abandoned his interest in Fascism. McCormack points out that Yeats accepted the Goethe Plakette from the *Oberbürgermeister* of Frankfurt for his play *The Countess Cathleen* (135). This event implies that it is evidence of Yeats’s Fascism that he did not boycott Fascist Germany. McCormack also contests Edward Said’s support of the grossly unsubstantiated legend that Communist poet Pablo Neruda claimed Yeats had written a letter of support for the Spanish Republican government against the Fascist Falange (137-38). Lastly, McCormack writes that Yeats voiced support for Nuremburg Legislation to the Dublin press in August of 1938 while simultaneously advertising support for eugenics in his pamphlet “On the Boiler” (139). McCormack comments that this correlation between support of Nazi legislation and the release of his pamphlet “seem[s] to me a historical datum almost banal in its obviousness” (139).

This fallacy McCormack makes in equating correlation with causation does not prove that Yeats clung to Fascism after 1936 when, according to Paul Scott Stanfield, the poet had repented of his interest in the movement because he came to view it as a popular attempt to abandon selfhood by embracing devotion to the state (76). Conversely, that



Yeats had earlier renounced interest in the potential of a formal alliance with Fascism does not mean he had completely lost responsiveness to Fascism's strong resemblance to the Antithetical. Yeats's practical relationship with Fascism was complex.

The school of thought that argues against Yeats's alleged Fascism makes appeals to his postcolonial concerns, and this is apparent in the responses of Debora Fleming and Edward Said to accusations against Yeats. Deborah Fleming cites Yeats in his own words to illustrate that his support of Franco's Falange was "to see the British Empire weakened – through a fascist victory in Spain – so that England would be forced to be civil to Indians, "perhaps to set them free" (147). On the surface, it is arguable that Yeats's postcolonial mindset of liberation and the equitable treatment of imperialized races are incompatible with the aggressive foreign policies, and in the case of National Socialism, the institutionalized racial prejudice of Fascism.

Stanfield's *Yeats and Politics in the 1930s* provides the most definitive source I use to refute that Yeats legitimately was a Fascist, yet Stanfield concedes to Yeats's interest in the movement. The nullification of the indictment that Yeats was a Fascist augmented with an acknowledgement of his interest in Fascism is important to my thesis. It is significant to my thesis because I argue that Yeats's interest in the Antithetical tincture permits an interest but prevents a full association. Stanfield's work also corroborates the assertion of this thesis that Yeats necessarily rejected Fascism because he came to believe it was another Primary form of government. According to Stanfield, "[Fascism] appeared less and less a movement founded on the self-sufficient few, more and more a way for men to abandon their conscience by losing themselves in something large, powerful and external" (76). Though Fascism could not lead to what the poet imagined as a more aris-

tocratic system within the proposed Antithetical influx (the coming Antithetical age), his interest in Fascism is beyond question.

Scholars such as Joseph Chadwick and Conor Cruise O'Brien generally take the approach that Yeats's interest in Fascism signifies extensive identification with the movement, but because he did not formally embrace Fascism critics tend to rely on a middle ground of presenting Yeats's Fascism as a troubling question. Chadwick's "Violence in Yeats's Later Politics and Poetry" and O'Brien's "Passion and Cunning: An Essay on the Politics of W.B. Yeats" are examples of critics grappling with what appears to be Yeats's less-than-formal Fascism as a sympathy that is inconclusive yet pesky in its presence. My argument explains that the vital understanding of Yeats's guarded interest in Fascism can be understood in context of his commitment to the theoretical system of *A Vision*.

Fascist nationalism may have seemed like a doorway to an Antithetical state, but Yeats's devotion to the Antithetical is what eventually dissuaded him from committing to Fascism. Yeats hoped Fascism would in due course open the door to rule by aristocracy, and as early as 1924 he declared "Authoritarian government is certainly coming...it must find some kind of expert government, a government firm enough, tyrannical enough if you will, to spend years in carrying out its plans" (qtd, in Stanfield 55). I argue that authoritarian rule by aristocracy is integral to Yeats's ideal of nationalism, but Fascism ultimately appeared as another form of Primary government. For example, Yeats was initially enthusiastic about the Army Comrades Association or "Blueshirts" because of their Fascist presence in Ireland (60). An individualistic and self-driven leader would have been an appealing aspect of Fascism as it appeared Antithetical; however, when he even-

tually met with Blueshirt leader Eoin O'Duffy, he was disappointed enough afterward to declare O'Duffy an "uneducated lunatic" (65).

Speciously, the Fascist movement is a demonstration of Yeats's historical theory of an Antithetical dispensation as he penned it in *A Vision*. The semblance is facile. On the surface, every designator of a coming Antithetical age is effectively intact within the political movement of Fascism; Yeats writes, "an antithetical dispensation obeys imminent power, is expressive, hierarchical, multiple, masculine, harsh, surgical" (*A Vision* 263). For all difficulty in precisely defining Fascism, Yeats's description of the Antithetical is Fascism in a nutshell. By the surface of things, it would be difficult to counter Yeats's culpability in his intellectual support of Fascism, but the decisive factor in understanding the complexity of the situation is in his description of the contrasting Primary.

In *A Vision*, Yeats describes a possible manifestation of the Primary as such: "A primary dispensation looking beyond itself towards a transcendent power is dogmatic, levelling, unifying, feminine, humane, peace its means and end" (263). The descriptions "feminine" "humane" and "peace"-seeking seem not to fit Fascism. But then, the Fascist-transcendental-romanticism of state worship fits as "dogmatic" behavior within the movement. Also "dogmatic" is the Fascist penchant for what Professor I.W. Charny labels "exaggerated certainty and absoluteness" in *Fascism and Democracy: In the Human Mind* (87). Likewise, the term "levelling" is the finest of Yeats's adjectives to describe how Fascism may operate under the Primary condition. Yeats meant "leveling" in both the socioeconomic sense of Marxist socialism that seeks a classless utopia and in the sense of Western Liberalism with its class mobility that allowed status climbing. Yeats's use of "leveling" demonstrates the religious, moral, and democratic nature of the Primary

as it denotes equality of the human race as a notion Western civilization inherited from Judeo-Christian tradition. Yeats's description of the Antithetical is tyrannical as appropriate to the despotism of Mussolini and Hitler, but Fascism appears Primary and "dogmatic" as the intellectual and moral levelling of a Fascist nation is elemental to the "mobilizing passions" of populism (Paxton 219).

Yeats's interest in authoritarian rule led him to a largely disappointing relationship with Fascism, and *A Vision*, his poetry and plays, and documentation of the poet's life and opinions demonstrate the complexity of his politics. Yeats's commitment to the Antithetical explains his interest in Fascism, yet this commitment simultaneously explains his inevitable aversion to Fascist nationalism as a Primary government that created an environment of conformity.

### "Proclaiming a New Divinity" A Rhetorical Analysis of *A Vision*

W. B. Yeats is an extraordinary example of an artist who produced his signature, and perhaps his greatest, work during the latter half of his career. He credits this progress to a spiritual experience through which he achieved dynamic and ongoing revelation. Uncanny events began occurring October 24, 1917 after which he accomplished a radical transition away from writing under the dominant influence of the Romanticist tradition (*A Vision* 8, Bornstein 20-21). He began to create a poetry attendant to Modernism that confronts the notion of a transforming world. Through mystical encounters experienced by him and by his wife Georgie Hyde-Lees during their experiments with automatic writing, Yeats was able to cultivate a theory describing the cyclic nature of reality and individual identity which he documents in *A Vision*, published in 1925.

The multigenre work is comprised of short fiction, poetry, illustrated diagrams, and exposition to elucidate his theory of the two-thousand year recurrence of Primary and Antithetical tinctures that exchange to define the characteristic atmosphere of an epoch. Individual humans are recurrently born into 28 different phases within both tinctures, from which they experience and learn from that expression of human life, but the general character of “the antithetical tincture” is “emotional and aesthetic whereas the primary tincture is reasonable and moral” (*A Vision* 73). This theory presents life and history as in a perpetual oscillation made possible by the tension between the co-present “tinctures” that diminish and increase to the proportion of “dying each other’s life, living each other’s death” (79, 68). The system of *A Vision* is meticulous, built on perceived correlations among sundry historical events and figures. Yeats uses adjectival bundles to describe the essence of the Primary and Antithetical when he writes “A primary dispensation looking beyond itself towards a transcendent power is dogmatic, levelling, unifying, feminine, humane, peace its means and end; an antithetical dispensation obeys imminent power, is expressive, hierarchical, multiple, masculine, harsh, surgical” (263). Here, the term “dispensation” describes a hypothesized influx of each era in turn, but the counterpoising serial adjectives that follow also function to describe an individual’s general nature. The possibilities of an individual’s nature are represented as a diagram of a bifurcated wheel with the 28 phases about its circumference; the left and “solar” side of the wheel holds people born Primary while the right and “lunar” side, Antithetical (81).

Though Yeats believed his theory was supernaturally revealed, he saw it as the details of a system of natural recurrence. His belief in recurrence is apparent in his qualification of the rising Antithetical age as a fresh recasting of past feudalism or of the

bronze era. The new Antithetical era is not ushered in magically, nor is it an ultimate collapse of civilization, but a new domineering age as Yeats writes: “my instructors certainly expect neither a “primitive state” nor a return to barbarism as primitivism and barbarism are ordinarily understood; antithetical revelation is an intellectual influx neither from beyond mankind nor born of a virgin, but begotten from our spirit and history” (262).

Yeats provides private, subjective anecdotes as evidence for his theory – he cites personal experience of supernatural phenomena – to validate the process of writing *A Vision*. Mysterious occurrences gave him unlikely procedural guidance in recording and maintaining the data his ostensible “instructors” or “communicators” provided him. He claims light flashed between him and his wife George and a piece of furniture was “violently struck” (15). Then he describes the manifestation of phantom aromas; all of these purported marvels he took license to interpret as precise warnings (15-16). The goal of Yeats’s book was to “proclaim a new divinity,” but it rests as an elaborate pseudoscience that never took hold (27). Yeats depends on correlations that equate to fancied significance. Such an example of his ascribing meaning to a correlation is when he discovered that dates and conclusions he held regarding his system matched those within a contemporaneous book released July 1918 titled *Decline of the West* (*A Vision* 11, 260-261, Surette 39). This was written by proto-Fascist and eventual Nazi adherent Oswald Spengler (Nally 332). Aside from merely providing anecdotal claims as evidence (that leave us with the question of poet, liar, or fanatic), *A Vision* ultimately acts as an exercise in what psychologists term “subjective validation” (Marks 21). In other words, Yeats finds or constructs connections and meaning that validate his personal ideas. It seems *A Vision* is a subjective reassertion of prior interests and biases. Thus, I will treat his works and life

events that predate the amalgamation of the notions declared in his system as relevant herein. Critics agree *A Vision* was a culminating work.

George Orwell follows biographer V.K. Narayana Menon is claiming *A Vision* is cumulative, and Bloom claims Yeats always had a form of *A Vision* in his creative mind even before Yeats wrote it. Orwell cites Menon's description of *A Vision* as a culmination: "Yeats's philosophical system, says Mr Menon, 'was at the back of his intellectual life almost from the beginning. His poetry is full of it. Without it his later poetry becomes almost completely unintelligible'" (georgeorwellnovels.com). Harold Bloom also proposes that *A Vision* is a culminating work: "Yeats was always writing mythologies, and it may therefore be said that he was always writing some *ur*-version of *A Vision*, many years before he conceived of his mythology proper" (210). This culmination is apparent by admission of the author as Yeats states that his disembodied "instructors" choose terms to delineate the system of *A Vision* from his previous work *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* (8, 20, 72). Yeats's confidence in aristocracy and his life as an artist are two defining elements of the Antithetical nature, and he intensely identified himself as Antithetical. With anticipation for the dawn of a new Antithetical era, he claims in *A Vision* "when the new gyre begins to stir, I am filled with excitement" (300). His occult system performs as an intensely personal work.

*A Vision* contains symbolic representations of the Antithetical and Primary as intersecting cones, gyres, whorls, and wheels, and by the arcane nature of his system, Yeats fears he may alienate a discriminating audience. He claims to fear that "some, perhaps all, of those readers I most value, those who have read me many years, will be repelled by what must seem arbitrary, harsh, difficult symbolism. Yet such has almost always ac-

accompanied expression that unites the sleeping and waking mind” (23). Yeats’s fear that readers would reject *A Vision* was warranted by their reaction. In *Dreams of a Totalitarian Utopia*, Leon Surette writes that *A Vision* indeed was unpopular, and “most of Yeats’ admirers found it an embarrassment” (40). It becomes, perhaps, appropriate to his personal identification with the aesthetic Antithetical that his system itself is a creative and willful act to interpret history and personality. The system seems more of a personal mythology, yet from his legitimate occult interests and the sincerity of delivery as he wishes to “proclaim a new divinity,” *A Vision* will be treated in this essay as his personal theory. The theory Yeats put forth in *A Vision* illustrates his attempt to make systematic sense from the elusive possibilities of a modern reality (Koch 147-148). The potential he perceived of the imminent new-millennial era carry political implications, and Yeats’s vision supported his long-held political and philosophical biases favoring art, mysticism, and aristocracy. These preferences directed him to an interest the Fascist movement. Yeats identified with the Antithetical through his nationalism, but he also expressed this chosen national identity through a nationalistic championing of art and culture for the sake of an Irish renaissance. Although Yeats was initially drawn to Fascism, he realized that his Antithetical ideal of nationalism was incompatible with the Fascist nationalism he judged as Primary. Fascist Nationalism dictated what a populace should be. However, in contrast to Fascism, the Antithetical does not conform to the masses as it fully occupies the self, so Fascist nationalism could not offer the Antithetical embodiment of selfhood.

## Contrasts between Cultural and Aesthetic Energies of the Fascist and the Antithetical Nation



The Fascist expression of the cultural and aesthetic in nationalism is designed to prescribe propaganda, and conventionality. The nationalistic expression of the Fascist cultural and aesthetic emphasizes censorship and develops conformity among the populace. This expression contrasts with Yeats's idea of nationalism. Yeats's Irish nationalism was based on Antithetical principles on individuality and authentic expression of an artist's inner life. Though Yeats saw the Antithetical as authoritarian, the authoritarianism of Fascist nationalism degraded the Antithetical purpose of artistic self-expression, and Fascism got in the way of the potential for a people to identify with their cultural identity. This chapter will provide examples to illustrate the contrast between Yeats's idea of cultural and aesthetic nationalism and the failure of Fascist nationalism to achieve an authentic aesthetic and cultural program of nationalism. Accordingly, Yeats would not judge Fascism to be Antithetical, but Primary in national character.

By 1889 Yeats was certain that Ireland lacked a strong literary tradition that reflected its national character, and he wrote "there is no fine nationality without literature, and...no fine literature without nationality" (qtd. in Pethica 130). Yeats attributed an Antithetical identity to Irish politician Charles Stewart Parnell. Yeats saw Parnell as distinctly Antithetical for the politician's "proud, masterful, and practical nature" (Allison 185). Parnell's political power was destroyed following the scandalous revelation of an extramarital affair, and Yeats embarked upon a revival effort to invigorate Ireland through boosting Celtic/Gaelic art and values (Stanfield 52). With the fall of Parnell, Yeats mourned the loss of Antithetical independence in Irish politics. He hoped to redirect Antithetical energy back into Irish nationalism as "Yeats hoped to fill an apparent political vacuum with cultural work," and "he and others dreamt...of a radical transfer of national

energies from the political to cultural spheres” (52). The Celtic influence was Antithetical because the pagan heroic mythologies and folklore of the past came from an Antithetical epoch prior to the current Primary era. During Yeats’s labors to bring a restoration in Celtic lifestyle and interests, he would encourage Irish writers to “take Irish subjects” as evident in the emphasis of his own early poetry that celebrated folklore, heroic legend, Irish pastoral, and he even wrote of anthropological interests (Pethica 130). This effort to use art and culture to elevate and spiritualize the national ethnic identity of the Irish people is similar to energetic efforts made by Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Yeats and the Fascists looked to the past to invigorate cultural identity.

David Barnes discusses the tension between Fascist cultural strategies and avant-garde futurists whom supported Fascism through art in “Fascist Aesthetics: Ezra Pound’s Negotiations in 1930s Italy.” According to Barnes, the forward-yearning futurist F.T. Marinetti was at times an awkward fit inside aesthetic efforts of the state because of “Fascism’s archaizing, nostalgic tendencies. Those tendencies look backwards to the glories of the past, for instance in the upholding of the ideal *Romanita* (‘Roman-ness’) and in appeals to mythic medieval and renaissance pasts” (22). The reactionary nature of the Italian Fascist fixation with the past, and the project of mythologizing it, resembles Yeats’s own attempt to start an artistic Irish renaissance. The resemblance between the nationalistic efforts of Italian Fascists to mythologize the past and Yeats’s nationalistic interest in doing this is important for two reasons. First, the Antithetical is defined as aesthetic; it is “expression for expression’s sake” (*A Vision* 130). Then, the Fascist glorification of the past parallels Yeats’s notion that the Antithetical would take the likeness of old-world tyranny by the systematic process of recurrence (Nally 331). The recurring cy-

cle of Yeats's system posits that the age of the twentieth century was upon a cusp, and the coming Antithetical age would bring an effective return to a more feudal civilization (*A Vision* 52).

Yeats, being recognized as Antithetical, could relate to a backward-looking, aesthetic cast of mind. Consequently, Yeats's commitment to system within *A Vision* inevitably influenced what Stanfield notes as an early esteem for Benito Mussolini's *Fascismo Italiano* (58). Also, the Fascist strategy of a highly stimulating aesthetic program of art and culture to serve as propaganda is comparable on the surface to the Antithetical notion that art can transform the world. Yeats, as self-described Antithetical personality, objected to Marxism as Primary because of its democratic and empirical core values. The Primary Marxist concept of dialectical materialism, which dictated that humans create art in response to stimuli, was especially offensive to Yeats's Antithetical aesthetic (Stanfield 83). In Yeats's philosophical objection, he found agreement with Il Duce's chief philosopher Giovanni Gentile's "actualism," which is rejecting "...the notion of reality as an object contemplated by the intellect. Reality, Gentile argued, is...the thought's act of self-consciousness. This activity...is self-creating, eternal, and engendered by the will; it exemplifies spirit's creativity as 'pure act' (*atto puro*) (Gentile qtd. in Flasca-Zamponi 358). Gentile's *atto puro* stance aligns with Yeats's Antithetical ideal of the subjective and willful aesthete who forms reality from within, rather than the Marxist stance that, as Yeats phrases it, "religion, art, philosophy, expressed economic change, [or that] the shell secreted the fish" (Yeats qtd. in Stanfield 83). Yeats resented the empirical nature of Marxism as Primary, and hostile to the Antithetical vision of nationalism as an aesthetic rebirth of Irish identity.

In “Micheal Robartes: Two Occult Manuscripts,” Walter Kelly Hood publishes Yeats’s unpublished work of meta-fiction titled “Micheal Robartes Foretells,” that contrasted the “creative” nature of the Antithetical with the ‘imitative’ nature of the Primary: “The antithetical is creative, painful – personal – the Primary imitative, happy, general” (222). This prose piece features a protégé of Robartes (the sagacious master of the system outlined in *A Vision*) who denounces the philosophy of dialectical materialism from its Hegelian base: “I reject Hegel’s all containing, all sustaining, all satisfying final wakefulness. I reject Marxian Socialism, in so far as it is derived from him (221). Yeats was typically hostile toward Marxist-realism in art because it lacked drama as it represented reality with veracity. He observed it was submissively reflective of reality instead of creative of reality. Yeats approved of Gentile’s *atto puro* theory of the epistemological relationship of the individual with reality. Gentile also espoused a theory of societal fluctuation that fit with Yeats’s notion of cyclic reality. This theory of cyclic reality denied the assertion of dialectical materialism that each new generation climbs or improves by holding previous generations accountable for errors. Yeats interprets Gentile’s Fascist philosophy as aligning with his theory of the recurring Primary and Antithetical eras in civilization:

...a similar circular movement fundamental in the works of Giovanni Gentile is, I read somewhere, the half-conscious foundation of the political thought of modern Italy. Individuals and classes complete their personality and then sink back to enrich the mass. Government must, it is held, because all good things have been created by class war, recognize that class war though it may be regulated must never end. (81-82)

In terms of Yeats's disgust with the dialectical materialist world view and his disdain for the democratic core of Marxism, the dually authoritarian and aesthetic spirit of Italian Fascism appears Antithetical. However, Fascist nationalism in both Germany and Italy used aesthetic appeals to create an environment of conformity which Yeats could not accept as an exhibition of Antithetical values.

Stanley G. Payne cites Karl Bracher's assessment of National Socialism in Germany as "a supreme new leadership cult of the Führer as the 'artist genius'" (484). Similarly, through an operation of enforced visibility, Mussolini's regime deployed a politics of symbols. Falasca-Zamponi claims that an aesthetic of propaganda was embedded into "several media" to "auratically glorify Mussolini's persona" and establish a sensation of his omniscience (352). To Yeats, this aesthetic effort appears Antithetical as an expressive display of the singular power of the individual in line with Gentile's philosophy. It presents Il Duce as "...the God-like artist-creator," which, in agreement with dialectical materialism, Falasca-Zamponi refutes as "...the myth of man's irreducibility to the serfdom of the senses" (353). Actually, Mussolini had purposed a "unifying" Primary aesthetic; Falasca-Zamponi writes that Mussolini imagined Fascism as developing "through close consideration of the role of rituals and symbols," and a "keen understanding of the generative potential of cultural norms" (352). Yet, intentions were not truly of an Antithetical aesthetic because they constitute a Primary "unifying," or intellectual "levelling," of the Italian nation. "Fascism's totalitarian goal of creating a world anew relied on the power of collective representation to colonize the fascist subject through a totalitarian intrusion into the body politic" (352). The Fascist effort to manipulate art and culture was interpreted to adopt an Antithetical character through "tyranny" and "fiction," because

Yeats used the adjective “tyranny” to describe the wilful and self-centered authoritarian power of the Antithetical and he used the adjective “fiction” to suggest the aesthetic power of the imagination (Stanfield 54, *A Vision* 52). Nonetheless, the nationalistic Fascist effort to manipulate art and culture appears Primary as these manipulations promote the unification and mediocrity of the masses.

Fascist nationalism showed hostilities to art and culture, and these hostilities complicate an interpretation that the Fascist movement typifies Antithetical tastes. Payne argued that a goal of the “theatrical politics” of Fascism was “the creation of normative aesthetics, a cult of artistic and political beauty... to create a ‘politics of beauty’ (*History of Fascism* 13). Yeats might have admired a politics of beauty because it resembled his ideal of an aesthetic approach to nationalism, but part of this project of “theatrical politics” entailed a censorship of which he saw as Primary in nature. The Nazi campaign against “degenerate art” was Primary in the sense that it rejected what it perceived as subversive art for the sake of a unifying social effort.

The Antithetical is not unifying, and Yeats was subversive. Often, to apply an anachronism to him, he reveled in political incorrectness. In his support of the Irish-Fascistic Blueshirts, Clair V Nally writes that Yeats, “wanted to stage a Blueshirted version of *Coriolanus* at the Abbey, mercifully resisted by other members of the Abbey administration” (339). In Yeats’s hope of a rising Antithetical Irish genius, he likely welcomed (to some degree) the public outrage against the plays he and his peers produced at the Abbey Theater; this crowd-indignation confirms the Antithetical nature of his art against a Primary cast of mind as it had appalled the common sensitivities of the multitude. There were even recurring riots at the Abbey Theater in protest to plays that had

offended the tastes of the indignant Dublin Catholic middle class. Yeats publicly rebuked a large group of protestors during a riot against the opening of Sean O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars*: "you have disgraced yourself again, is this to be the recurring celebration of the arrival of Irish genius?" (qtd. in Alldritt 297). His disdain and anxious desire for the abeyance of the Western, and very Primary, humanitarian tradition exemplifies his contrarian aesthetic. John R. Harrison writes: "...Yeats frequently repudiated humanitarian ideals. (He thought [John Millington] Synge necessary to the Irish dramatic movement partly because he was 'incapable of humanitarian purpose')" (373). The anti-thetical was individualistic and independent, so an Antithetical figure would clash with a controlling Fascist government. One can hardly imagine that Yeats, a self-styled Antithetical provocateur, would thrive as an artist in the face of the civic restrictiveness of the Third Reich's "degenerate art."

Hitler's government intended art to transform a nation. Yeats held a hope for this also, but expressive and subjective art, such as Synge's remonstrated romp *The Playboy of the Western World* that was released by Yeats in 1907 to a week of rioting, because it transgressed against public mores (McCormack). Hitler presented tame art as part of Germany's nationalistic program, and Antithetical art would be considered subversive to the German Fascist government and likely also its public, as it would affront the moralist mind-frame Yeats attributed to the Primary bourgeoisie. Payne writes, "...in practice most of [the Fascist culture of National Socialism's] national and racial values were based on bourgeois or traditional morality. A major aspect of Fascist technique was to actualize these concepts through new forms of public aesthetics and liturgy" (*History of Fascism* 451). Stanfield interprets Yeats's use of the words "leveling" and 'unifying' to

describe Primary attributes that “point to conformity, enforced mediocrity, the founding of the state on the average citizen” (49). Yeats would see the Fascist affinity for the safeguarding of conventional values in German art and culture as an alliance with a servile mode of being that he felt coddled the “ignorance” and “superstitious piety” of the “new class” bourgeois (qtd. in Stanfield 31-32). He felt this anger toward the preponderance and philistinism of the Dublin Catholic middle class.

The Nazi determination to use racism and expurgation as societal norming for unadventurous thinking, – the vilest extreme, to intentionally foster a society of boorish bootlickers, – opposes the Antithetical quality of “intellectual innocence” and “recklessness” (32). Hitler banned new art in favor of traditional works devoid of any sense of beauty that corresponds with an Antithetical recklessness, and Yeats had released work that was perhaps intended to offend. Stanfield writes that Yeats long held “...an appetite for controversy and political combat...” (20). The Nazi’s underhanded intentions of censorship and playing to racial bias opposes what Yeats envisions as pure artistic expression, and the Nazi intention to engineer conformity with art contrasts Yeats’s combative displays of aesthetic conviction. Aside from the scientifically falsifiable racial theories of degenerationism, the label of the *entartete Kunst*, or “degenerate art,” carried an additional moral implication.

Nazi Germany used the term “degenerate art” to suppress artwork, and this term carried a deluded ethical dimension of concern for public morality. This moral concern permits a discrepancy with the Antithetical principles of the iconoclastic Yeats. The Nazi’s prim concern with mild art was anti-aesthetic because the hidden curriculum of presenting modern artwork as “degenerate” was to retard the modern sensibilities of the



populace for the sake of binding them in conformity. The agenda of racial hygiene was used to as an appeal to the anti-Semitic fears that had been systematically cultivated and exacerbated by the Nazi party, but this itself was part of the ruse. The dual deceit of Josef Goebbels's Reich Ministry for Public Enlightenment was to use "degenerate art" as a platform to make yet another inimical statement against Jews, and, significantly in regard to the censorship of art, to direct the mainstream populace to a "benign" public aesthetic. The majority of contemporaneous artwork was considered "Judeo-Bolshevik" though according to Alexander De Grande, "only six of the 112 artists included in the 1937 Nazi Degenerate Art Exhibition were Jews" (72). The Antithetical cast of mind would reject such sneaky motives for censorship as a favoring of an inauthentic aesthetic. The Nazi attempt to screen the public from art that was subjective, personal, and dangerous represents an inverse of Yeats's Antithetical desire that the community appreciate true art that epitomized the internal life, the passionate soul, of the artists.

Hitler's government was authoritarian and appealing to Yeats, but the nationalistic efforts against art were Primary because they were opposed to individuality. Though the Nazi regime appeared to be totalitarian and strong-willed, the Antithetical Yeats would have viewed this Nazi endorsement of the conventional as similar to what he termed as "the egalitarian preference for the average over the extraordinary that characterized De Valera's political programme and political instincts" (qtd. in Stanfield 35). Under the first ten years of De Valera's governance a number of Irish writers had their works banned in Ireland, and in 1937 he drafted the censorship into Ireland's new constitution (33). De Valera also moved against the Abbey Theater. De Valera reduced the government's annual subsidy to the theater from £1000 to £750 (20). Dr. Richard Hayes

was appointed the government representative on the Abbey board of directors, and Hayes vetoed the production of Yeats's *The Herne's Egg* on the grounds that it was blasphemous. The subversive art of Yeats and company that was featured at the Abbey also riled the Irish-American public. In response to the Abbey players planning a tour in the United States, Irish-Americans sent complaints to de Valera that inspired the head of state to issue a statement of disapproval to the press, and Yeats responded with a statement claiming he would willingly lose the government subsidy "than permit such interference" (Stanfield 33-34). Yeats viewed the long battle against censorship as a vexing example of the mob dictating artistic merit to experts, and the Nazi's manipulative expurgations based on the principle of stabilizing a Primary civic morality would not have charmed him.

Any propitiation of the bourgeois mob irked him, and Yeats did not see the values of what he considered "the new class" as characteristic of the Irish spirit. He believed the bourgeoisie had "risen above the traditions of the countrymen, without acquiring those of cultivated life, or even educating themselves," and he requested that the middle class refer to the leisured class in matters of art (41). "Degenerate art" was an effort to distance innovative approaches to art and culture in order to paralyze the bourgeois in a social and intellectual deficit that left them out of touch with modern thought. "Nazi art criticism, for example, upheld the populist view that the common man was the best judge of art and that art that did not appeal to popular taste was decadent" (Soucy 8). This socially constructed attempt to create an aesthetic stupor by removing art that would guide citizens into new cognitive territory would be interpreted by Yeats as an egregiously Primary "leveling." As much as authoritarian government represents the Antithetical in using art

to transform reality, the herding, and book-burning proclivities found in Fascist states present an intellectually deadening social cohesion that Yeats would not recognize as Antithetical government.

Yeats waged a struggle against the crowd that was quite opposed to Fascism's taming attempts. He sought to create and promote art to enlighten the Irish people and resented the deadened aesthetic sense of the common mob. Thus, the mob mentality of Fascist nationalism would have irritated him. Yeats did not relate to the Primary disposition that favored censorship, and in cases where he resented society's moralizing ignorance, he would often use art to protest. During Yeats's growth as an artist, Pethica states "[his] sense of... the artist's role as a solitary disturber-figure, progressively deepened" (138). Again, his struggles at the Abbey Theater likely encouraged his development of the Antithetical "disturber-figure." Yeats penned "On Those That Hated Playboy of the Western World,' 1907" to castigate detractors of his fellow playwright John Synge's controversial play. In this poem, Yeats uses the libertine Don Juan as a purposefully transgressive personality to cut the bourgeoisie crowd. The withering poem describes the horde as crowds of "Eunuchs" that "ran through Hell" to look upon Don Juan (*Collected Poems* 111, 2). Don Juan the seducer is not presented here in Primary terms as a "rake punished" by being dragged to hell by the ghostly father of a girl he deflowered, a man whom Don Juan also killed (Burke 1). Rather, he is a transgressive and Antithetical expression of magnificence and impunity. Yeats characterizes tasteless outrage among the masses as impotence in contrast to Don Juan's bully-virility. Yeats criticizes the plebeians as indignant and destitute of power by showcasing the petty, crowded, outrage of the Primary:

Once when midnight smote the air,  
 Eunuchs ran through Hell and met  
 On every crowded street to stare  
 Upon great Juan riding by:  
 Even like these to rail and sweat  
 Staring upon his sinewy thigh (*Collected Poems* 111)

The same Antithetical resentment toward philistinism in Ireland that, as early as 1908, caused him in his poem “Words” to call Ireland “...this blind bitter land,” stiffened as Yeats grew in conviction that an artist’s “task should be a defiant expression of “the joy that is themselves” (qtd. in Pethica). This Antithetical defiance expresses joy that is subjective, aesthetic, and independent. A Fascist government like Nazi Germany that eventually banned art criticism altogether provides no country for a subjective artist (De Grande72). Fascist nationalism made intentional efforts to censor perceived cultural and artistic threats, and the movement also hijacked mythological heroism to subjugate the populace whereas Yeats desired art, folklore, and legend as the loci of a liberating exploration of Irishness.

### “Love War:” Contrasts between the Ideals of Yeastsian and Fascist Heroism

Fascist nationalism created an environment of public mediocrity and obedience through distorting art and culture. Similarly also, it presented a constructed national warrior mentality to cultivate the conformity of the masses. Yeats used the warrior as an image of the solitary Antithetical figure, and *The Irish Airman* and *Cuchulain* are representations of this ideal. These representations are relevant to Yeats’s idea of Irish national-

ism because they show a selfhood undiluted by popular conformity. Yeats used his warrior figures to exemplify the Antithetical quality of intellectual independence and unconditional embodiment of one's identity that is essential to his vision Irishness. The Fascist warrior was overwhelmed by the influence of the state, and Fascism failed to represent the unrestricted selfhood of an Antithetical warrior.

Fascists encouraged a cultural milieu that celebrated the pagan-heroic past to augment nationalism: Robert Soucy states, "although many Italian Fascists remained Catholic, the regime's mystique contained pagan elements that glorified the spirit of ancient Rome and the military virtues of its soldiers," and "Hitler... ultimately wished to replace Christianity with a racist form of warrior paganism (10)" "To his critics Hitler replied, 'People accuse us of being barbarians; we are barbarians, and we are proud of it!' (8). This statement significantly reflects the practiced "Heathenry," or celebration of Neopaganism, of the nationalistic society *Thule-Gesellschaft*, which transformed into the German Workers Party, and finally became the National Socialist German Workers Party (Nazi) after Hitler got involved (Payne 151-54). Robert Soucy discussed how Futurist Bertrand de Jouvenel

praised the 'brutal barons' of the Middle Ages and the original conquerors of Europe, the Franks. 'Fascist man,' he wrote, was 'a throwback to the warrior and property holder of yesteryear, to the type of man who was the head of a family and a clan: When this type of man ceases to win esteem and disappears, then the process of decadence begins' (7)

Common to Fascist ideology, the association with clan-kinship, strength, and collective ancestry represents why the feudal aesthetic of the cultural past initially appealed to

Yeats as Antithetical. In 1936, Carl Gustav Jung examined the Scandinavian god Wotan, as a Teutonic archetype behind the outbreak of paganized nationalism in Germany. Jung attributed “Wotan” as the psychological phenomenon behind the “violent and restless effects” of the herd mentality within Nazism (Goodrick-Clarke 275). Jung states,

When, for instance, the belief in the god Wotan vanished and nobody thought of him anymore, the phenomenon originally called Wotan remained; nothing changed but its name, as National Socialism has demonstrated on a grand scale. A collective movement consists of millions of individuals, each of whom shows the symptoms of Wotanism and proves thereby that Wotan in reality never died, but has retained his original vitality and autonomy. (qtd, in Goodrick-Clarke).

The spiritual connotations of Wotan-as-symbol align with Yeats’s concentration on promoting the pagan heroic past to demonstrate strength and distinctiveness of cultural identity, but Jung’s observation of mob mania contrast both with Yeats’s intentions in Ireland and his general interest in Fascism. What Payne diagnoses as the Fascists’ “pagan warrior mentality” was central to the cultural exaltation of ethnic lore and legend (*History of Fascism* 486) but, heroic legend was attractive to Yeats as the means to cultivate individuality and fully express selfhood (Pethica 129).

In his 1902 introduction to Lady Augusta Gregory’s translation of *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*, Yeats wrote that myth recalled a time “when people were in love with a story, and gave themselves up to imagination as if to a lover” (“Explorations” 5). Yeats imagined they “must have felt like rabbits digging their burrows under walls that had been built by Gods and Giants, or like swallows building their nests in the stone mouths of

immense images, carved by nobody knows who” (7). Yeats uses language of surrender and awe to describe the aesthetic power of imagination and to imply a personal and spiritual link to a national past. This passionate language illustrates an important dissimilarity; the solitary and subjective nature of the Antithetical is apparent even in the mythological work of the first two decades of Yeats’s Romantic writing, and it contrasts with the “levelling” spirit of Fascist efforts to condition warriors that exist in a vacuous subservience to the state. Yeats criticized earlier Irish folklorists for being slanted in their interpretations, molding Celtic legend “to fit their own political or literary convictions, and thus produced inauthentic stereotypes” (qtd. in Pethica 132). From an Antithetical perspective, these inauthentic stereotypes are a product of Primary art and culture in its decline. The violent restlessness of Wotanism exemplifies the Primary collective thinking that is contrary to the idea of the solitary Antithetical hero.

In Yeats’s “A Prayer for My Daughter,” from *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* published in 1921, the speaker prays against the influence of Primary vindictiveness in his wish that his daughter grow into a fruitful adult: “An intellectual hatred is the worst, / So let her think opinions are accursed (*Collected Poems* 188, 57-58). Yeats saw intellectual hatred as an objective distain, and it was impersonal, thus, Primary. Yeats characterized it through the example of the Jacobean revolutionary Maximilien Robespierre when he writes, “primary men whose hatreds are impersonal are violent in their intellect but gentle in themselves, as doubtless Robespierre was gentle” (*A Vision* 85). This intellectual hatred is representative of the Primary cast of mind, and conversely Yeats wrote that “antithetical men are...violent in themselves because they hate all that impedes their personality, but in their intellect...gentle” (84-85). Intellectual hatred is opinionated, and it is

not an Antithetical hatred for an opposition to individuality. The cultivation of mass-intellectual hatred in Fascist nationalism is meant to direct the populace against the enemies of the state. In this sense, it is impersonal.

This contrast between such herd mentality and the solitary nature of the Antithetical hero relates to Yeats's notion that an Antithetical hero can achieve "Unity of Being," which is a wholeness that is defined as achieving harmony between one's intellectual existence and spiritual passion (Bloom 243, *A Vision* 82). This unity is only available to an Antithetical individual, and this occupying of the self prepares the individual to face any fate. Yeats also saw Unity of Being as an actual reoccurring event that last took place in 1450 when humanity attained to heroic character in great numbers (Koch 109). This "Unity of Culture," as he called it, may have seemed like a possibility to Yeats as he initially witnessed Fascist nationalism (*A Vision* 190). Such unity could occur in civilization, but as the system of recurrence happens on both a historical and individual scale it is relevant to a single person. A Primary program of art and culture as a tool of indoctrination reduces men to mere warriors for the state, and such indoctrination only offers the opportunity to sacrifice for the multitude. Thus, it opposes the notion of Unity of Being as achieved by a heroic self-assertion, which is an independent expression of selfhood found in a warrior's solitary deed. The Yeatsian Cuchulain provides the principal example of an Antithetical hero to contrast the Fascist warrior mentality.

According to Pethica, Yeats uses the Celtic mythological hero Cuchulain in his writing, and he identifies with the hero personally "to express his own sense of his conflicted relationship with Ireland" (142). It is notable that Yeats chooses the solitary and violent Cuchulain who progresses in the poet's characterizations to embody the Antithet-



ical. In Irish legend, Cuchulain is represented as a character naturally set against society with his *riastrad*, or berserker rages, that occasionally cause him to kill indiscriminately (van Zanten- Utrecht 48). Yeats portrays his disruptive presence in the poem “Cuchulain’s Fight with the Sea” written in 1893, where he contrasts the raging hero with King Conchubar who represents the Primary inclination for peace and the preservation of society.

In the poem, Cuchulain slips into a trance of sorrow after finding he has unknowingly killed his son in combat. King Conchubar knows Cuchulain will attack indiscriminately when he wakes from his trance, and he sends druids to enchant Cuchulain and make the hero fight in futility against the ocean (*Collected Poetry* 75-76, 33). Conchubar commands his druids to “Chaunt in his ear delusions magical, / that he may fight the horses of the sea” (80-81, 33). Pethica illustrates the unruly Antithetical personality as it appears in Yeats’s 1908 play *The Golden Helmet* by calling Cuchulain “...a disruptive surrogate Christ, who remains mockingly distanced from the culture whose weakness he reveals, and who relishes his own status as a scapegoat or combative disturber” (141). In Yeats’s 1904 play *On Baile’s Strand*, the Primary natured King Conchubar argues with Cuchulain in order to persuade the warrior to serve the community. Cuchulain refuses to take an oath to the king, saying “I’ll be not bound / I’ll dance or hunt, / or quarrel or make love, / wherever or whenever I’ve a mind to” (*Collected Works* 177-179). The play makes a point to show how Cuchulain is generally guided by solitary whim, an attitude contrasted with Conchubar’s appeals to Primary concerns of loyalty to the state.

King Conchubar declares to Cuchulain that the warrior must also obey the king’s son. Here, the King’s command for the warrior to obey the royal family represents impo-

sition of societal order upon the Antithetical character. Cuchulain admits that he does not respect the king's children and the poetic dialogue goes thus:

Conchubar: You rail at them  
 because you have no children of your own.  
 Cuchulain: I think myself most lucky that I leave  
 no pallid ghost or mockery of a man  
 to drift and mutter in corridors  
 where I have laughed and sung (225-229).

Cuchulain's declaration of unencumbered individuality is illustrated here through his lack of deference to the traditional Primary values that Conchubar represents. Stanfield writes how the militarized character of Fascism failed to represent the unrestricted selfhood of an Antithetical warrior: "By 1936 Yeats saw in Fascism...[a] wish to abandon selfhood by joining a mass. "[Fascism's] faith in 'marching men' was too great. As early as 1902...Yeats had used 'marching feet' as a figure for the intellectual cowardice that takes refuge by identifying with the mass" (76). Yeats had come to realize that Fascism, despite deceptive initial appearances, "represented not the beginning of a new Antithetical cycle but the decadence of the old Primary cycle" (76). Though Yeats linked "war" as an essential quality of the Antithetical, the warrior Cuchulain would not make an oath to Conchubar to wage war for the state. He refused Conchubar's efforts to rein him in, and this independent quality – this unwillingness to "abandon selfhood by joining a mass" – is in sharp contrast to the Fascist ideal that a warrior is nothing apart from the state.

In "Violence in Yeats's Later Politics and Poetry," Joseph Chadwick uses Walter Benjamin's argument that the political strategy of Fascism was to "offer a purely aesthet-

ic model of social change: Fascism, according to Benjamin, necessarily aestheticizes politics because it gives the masses ‘a chance to express themselves’...And war, he argues, is the ultimate consequence...” (869). Fascism’s capability to offer catharsis to the masses, or a kind of mass-sublimation that allows for expansionist war efforts, may have been interpreted by Yeats as applicably Antithetical as it is both aesthetic and bellicose. Yet, once again, the Primary herd-mentality is detectable at Fascism’s core. Chadwick writes that central is Fascism’s “aestheticizing [of] politics in a way Benjamin defines, which is to make actual historical events serve as signs of some political change they do not materially accomplish” (872). No social revolution is accomplished, least of all the higher aesthetic purpose of self-expression that is individuation. Rather, this warpath of expression is a mass-hysteria where individuals can abandon themselves to the external cause of the state. Payne describes *Kriegserlebnis* as an example the false aesthetic of self-expression that Fascist nationalism used to manipulate popular support for policies of aggression:

*Völkisch* [folk/populist] culture particularly affirmed a myth dear to all nationalist opinion – the mystique of the *Kriegserlebnis*, or ‘myth of war experience.’ This insisted on the sacred union of the war, the mutual relationship and common responsibility engendered by national struggle and sacrifice, and the higher values and transvaluation of life made possible by German unity in militant patriotic causes (*A History of Fascism* 162).

For Nazi Germany’s purpose of war, national-affirmation deformed the private will and the capacity for authentic internal expression. Payne writes, “Mussolini was determined

to expand Italy's empire," and he wanted to transform "a gesticulating, chattering, superficial, and carnivalesque country,' as Il Duce once put it, into a new nation of warriors, of real Fascists" (233). Fascism created an inauthentic stereotype with an intellectually leveling aesthetic and cultural program, and it directed the nationalistic horde to war.

With their celebration of *Kriegserlebnis* and of Wotanism, and Italian *Romanita*, Fascists used nationalism to advance a kind of mob warrior-soul to alter the individual into an extension of the state. The Fascist ideal of heroism, of an all-consuming devotion to the state and the warrior's self-sacrifice for the nation, contrasts with the Antithetical ideal embodied in the Yeatsian Cuchulain. Yeats casts Cuchulain as the quintessential Antithetical hero as he personifies the creativity, and embodies the distinct individuality, of what Yeats imagined as the pagan-heroic past. The Yeatsian Cuchulain is a hero of independent action specific to the theory of the Antithetical in *A Vision*. The power of the private whim and will is important to designate this warrior of Irish legend as an Antithetical hero because such Antithetical heroism leads the character to shape his outer world by his inner desire. Cuchulain as an Antithetical hero makes his passions true by exerting himself toward whatever his private desire may be. Therefore, he is not subservient to the state, so the Antithetical Cuchulain could never fit in a program of Fascist nationalism. This alignment with reckless passion could be deadly, and Yeats's Cuchulain engages in his own doom. This embracing of fate is important because for the Antithetical hero the realization of inner passion is more important than preserving a quotidian life. To illustrate, it is convenient to make a comparison to The Irish Airman, an Antithetical hero Yeats imagined six years prior to publishing *A Vision*.

The Antithetical “Irish Airman” exemplifies an impulsiveness parallel to the reckless aristocratic heroes Yeats later described. This character was likely based on Major Robert Gregory, the son of Yeats’s aristocratic benefactor Lady Gregory who owned an estate at Kiltartan Cross (Conner 100). Yeats modeled this heroic prototype in his 1919 poem from *The Wild Swans at Coole* titled “An Irish Airman Foresees His Death.” The Airman is comparable to Yeats’s final dramatic treatment of Cuchulain in the 1939 *The Death of Cuchulain*. In “Irish Airman” the speaker declares:

I know that I shall meet my fate  
 somewhere among the clouds above;  
 those that I fight I do not hate,  
 those that I guard I do not love,” (“Collected Poetry” 135, 1-4)

The Airman’s merit of solitude and recklessness defines the pilot as Antithetical. He is emotionally and intellectually solitary as a fighter pilot in comparison to any other Primary-natured soldier whom performs duty under servile patriotism and pack-identification to protect his nation’s people. Rather, Yeats wrote it was “a lonely impulse of delight / drove to this tumult in the clouds” (11-12). Similarly, the doom of Cuchulain is a subject Yeats used in his final play to comment on a “tragic” frame of mind, and Cuchulain’s mind toward his death resembles the Irish Airman’s. Yeats’s idea of tragedy is essential to the Antithetical character, and this tragic sense is lacking in Fascist nationalism’s demonstration of the warrior.

The Antithetical is tragic in a Yeatsian sense, and this is the disparagement between the Antithetical hero and the Primary Fascist hero. The Antithetical hero has a “Vision of Evil,” or an ability to reconcile evil and personal catastrophe with fate (*A Vision*

136, 144, Stanfield 80). According to Garab, the Antithetical hero, like Lear, or any tragic character, can finally laugh upon doom and the undoing of one's desires so to validate the awful experience through tragic joy, or "tragic gaiety" as it is termed in his poem "Lapis Lazuli," because by their frank and free-spirit they accept the reality of their tragic situation (*Collected Poems* 294, 9-24, Garab 46-48). After Cuchulain had received six mortal wounds in battle he was still alive though weakened and quilled with arrows, so he strapped himself to a pillar to die standing when the Blind Man from *On Baile's Strand* makes a surprise appearance. The Blind Man claims "If I brought Cuchulain's head in a bag / I would be given twelve pennies" (*Collected Works* 163-64). There is a sense of intrepid whim as Cuchulain responds to the price on his head, saying "Twelve pennies. / What better reason for killing a man? / You have a knife, but have you sharpened it?" (170-71). Accordingly, Cuchulain, wounded yet amused and plucky, allows a blind beggar to saw his head off with a knife typically used for eating (172-84). The exultation lies in Cuchulain's heroic surrender and in his "lonely impulse of delight." He triumphs over the dreadfulness of his circumstance by fully embracing it all. He would strap himself to a pillar to die standing, but in tragic joy he is charmed to dismiss his death for a mere pittance. Cuchulain may have laughingly agreed with the Irish Airman:

I balanced all, brought all to mind,

The years to come seemed waste of breath,

A waste of breath the years behind

In balance with this life this death (*Collected Poetry* 135, 13-16).

Yeats again demonstrates the tragic mindset of the Antithetical in 1933 with the poem "A Dialogue of Self and Soul" from *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*. Here, the Antithet-

ical embracing of “evil” causes the horror to transform into joy. This transformation of dread into joy is an enduring theme in Yeats’s canon.

Measure the lot; forgive myself the lot!  
 When such as I cast out remorse  
 So great a sweetness flows into the breast  
 We must laugh and we must sing,  
 We are blest by everything,  
 Everything we look upon is blest (67-68)

Here, we experience what seems an ironic laughter. However, it is a heroic casting out of Primary pity, or “remorse” for the tragedy of one’s condition, and a laughing in tragic gaiety as the hero fully occupies the self (Stanfield 89). The posture of the Antithetical hero is so subjective and self-delighting that it is incompatible with Fascist-heroic ideology.

Yeats’s idea that civilization can be renewed through violence is relevant to Fascist nationalism, and this doubtlessly added for him an Antithetical appeal to Fascism. In *A Vision*, Michael Robartes declares to his pupils:

Dear predatory birds, prepare for war, prepare your children and all that you can reach, for how can a nation or a kindred without war become that ‘bright particular star’ of Shakespeare, that lit the roads in boyhood? Test art, morality, custom, thought, by Thermopylae; make rich and poor act so to one another that they can stand together there. Love war because of its horror, that belief may be changed, civilization renewed (51-52).

Yeats's response to modernity in writing *A Vision* is similar to Mussolini's eclectic seam-ing of the ancient and modern to promote war as regenerative. The Fascists' wanted to create a new world. In justifying his invasion of Ethiopia, Mussolini stated his vision of the developing Fascist state as the progressive renewal of civilization through a forceful government that was cultured by ancient glory yet ultramodern in its authoritarianism (qtd. in Griffen 72-78).

Early on, Mussolini was as an Italian Socialist. He was never an orthodox Marx-ist. Nevertheless, according to Payne, "Mussolini spoke of himself as an 'authoritarian' and 'aristocratic' Socialist; he was elitist...and he believed in regenerative violence" (*History of Fascism* 83). This unorthodox political self-expression is apparent in what Payne claimed was developed Fascism's paradoxical "pagan-warrior mentality [that] sometimes conflicted with the norms and processes of modernization" (486). The *Partito Nazionale Fascista* used rhetoric to boost war as a breaking of the threshold into a new reality; in a transcript of Mussolini's speech announcing Italy's entry into Global War, it is evident that the Italian people were in agreement with regenerative violence, just as were Robartes' "predatory birds." "An hour marked by destiny is striking in the skies of our Fatherland. [loud cheers] The hour of irrevocable decisions. The declaration of war has been sent [cheers, loud shouts of 'War! War!'] to the ambassadors of Great Britain and France (qtd. in Griffen 82). Such Fascist exhortation corresponds with Robartes' ear-lier prophetic incitement to "...prepare for war, prepare your children and all that you can reach" (*A Vision* 52). The "terror to come," as Robartes predicted, was only a tearing of the veil because Yeats represented the Antithetical era as providing a renewal to the rule



of the few over the many and restore Europe from the mediocrity and degeneracy of the liberal bourgeoisie (*A Vision* 50).

In scrutinizing the surface of this palingenetic tyranny, Fascism was interpreted by Yeats as having potential to reflect the Antithetical. The new world would be under hierarchical rule. Yeats represents the coldness of an ideal Antithetical leader and the stratification of class in his two verse poem "Parnell." Yeats wrote, "Parnell came down the road, he said to the cheering man; / 'Ireland shall get her freedom and you still break stone'" (*Collected Poems* 312). Yeats's relationship between aristocratic rulers and their subjects in an idyllic Antithetical kingdom involves less exploitation of "the many" than what occurs under insincere Fascist manipulations. However, Yeats's vision of the ruling class is one coldly inattentive to social justice or egalitarianism. In an Antithetical state, Yeats believed fixed class situations were natural. The Airman's declaration of indifference to fighting for his countrymen ("Kiltartan's poor") identifies the stratified condition of the peasantry as "No likely end could bring them loss / Or leave them happier than before" (*Collected Poems* 135, 7-8). Yeats's ideal Antithetical state still does not lend itself to Fascism as Chadwick states, "Even at the very height of his enthusiasm for a Fascist movement in practical politics, Yeats presents that movement not, as Mussolini and Gentile would, as a way of affirming that 'everything is in the State, and nothing human or spiritual exists, much less has value, outside the state'" (888). Fascism speciously values self-expression as populist warrior spirit, but this herd mentality conveniently props-up tyranny and war. Yeats came to view Fascism as a Primary circus of anti-selfhood. This loss of identity to the state has a population transformed to cogs in a machine hulking to

war, but for Yeats, knowing one's place in a social hierarchy ("...and you still break stone) and being stunted into a mere appendage of the state are contrary.

## Contrasts between Yeats's Ideal Antithetical Commonwealth and the Fascist Social Reality

In Yeats's ideal of Antithetical nationalism, aristocratic autonomy manifests as self-expression in the context of family rule, and when the peasantry occupies their proper position in social hierarchy they too manifest a distinct selfhood. This is contrary to Fascist nationalism that sought for citizens of all classes to a likeness through state devotion. Yeats's vision of an Antithetical commonwealth supposed that embracing class inequality would curtail mediocrity. Yeats believed his Antithetical ideal could re-flourish the richness of weakened Irish identity. The Antithetical system of permanent aristocratic family dynasty over an expansive plebian underclass contrasts the national conformity that turned Fascist citizens into mere extensions of the state.

Here, we arrive at what seems to be a quandary in the system of *A Vision*, and it is necessary to explore the level of autonomy possible for the underclass in an Antithetical epoch. This will help differentiate between what Jonathan Allison called Yeats's idealized Antithetical community of "peasant, artist, and ascendancy," and the popular nationalism of Fascism (186). If the underclasses are to submit their autonomy to the aristocracy, then how does Yeats come to dislike Fascism as a form of anti-selfhood? And, if members of the patrician class are to individuate, to become distinct within the confines of family, than how can Yeats claim to hate democracy despite his support of self-fashioning which is the crux of democracy? First, we must note that what was excruciating to Antithetical Yeats was, to quote "The Second Coming," that the "best [who] lack

all conviction,” (the aristocracy) melded or degenerated into the masses (*Collected Poems* 185, 7). His main concern for the diminishing of selfhood focused on the dilution of the aristocratic classes as he believed that they were destined to advance civilization by the excellence of their rule. However, his concern with the selfhood of the underclass should not be misunderstood or taken to be unimportant. To contrast Yeats’s concern with the identity of the underclass who must be ruled, especially in contrast to the intellectually leveling nationalism of Fascist states, we must examine several texts and evidence of Yeats’s thinking that show that though there would be only two true classes, ruler and ruled, within Yeats’s vision, the underclass yet has attainable a particular gift of human personality, or genius.

With this in mind Yeats seems almost paradoxical, or at least hyperbolic, when he criticizes all democracy for “substituting for the old humanity with its unique irreplaceable individuals something that can be cut up and measured like a piece of cheese” (Chadwick 882). Yeats’s lauding of “unique irreplaceable individuals” is to be understood as his typical favoritism fundamentally directed toward a bygone aristocracy. But, it would be an oversight to think Yeats would not to some degree share this compliment with historical peasantry. The Antithetical age would be one with the many under subjugation, but Yeats admired peasants for being exceptionally in touch with a selfhood proper to their class and essential to national identity. Yeats viewed the traditions of the Irish rustics as essential to Irishness, and early in his career he had defined folklore as the “literature of a class... ‘who have steeped everything in the heart’ and folk poetry as naturally expressive of the peasants close proximity to ‘the woods and hills and waters about him” (qtd. in Pethica 137).” Yeats’s nationalistic vision of peasant rustics was essential to

his notion of Irishness. Stanfield states that Yeats “often used the poor, road wandering countryman as an example of perfect freedom” (50). He even initiated his work as a playwright by scripting “peasant plays.” At the end of his “peasantry” period, Stanfield claims that Yeats “began to credit the vital imaginative core of folklore to the literary genius of a few pre-eminent makers of folk poetry, rather than to the imaginative sensibilities of the country people in general” (137). Yeats transitions from attributing these imaginative sensibilities as a general quality, and this demystifies and perhaps seems to devalue the peasantry as a whole. Nonetheless, the attribution of individual peasant genius is familiar to readers as what becomes Yeats’s enthrallment with individual personality and ability found in *A Vision*. This acknowledgement illustrates the animation of plebian personality that Yeats would include in his acclaim for the “unique irreplaceable individuals” of “old humanity” (Chadwick 882).

Yeats writes in *A Vision* about the influence of Honoré de Balzac who doubtlessly influenced Yeats’s conception of an Antithetical commonwealth. The French novelist’s philosophy of the decline of civilization that governed his novels was compatible with Yeats’s worldview. Yeats also perceived a literary kindred spirit in Balzac because Yeats felt he shared an aesthetic locus of despair (Stanfield 113). That Yeats often wrote from despair about the decline of culture illustrates the poet’s enduring, even growing, appreciation of Balzac. Yeats wrote of Balzac: “His social order is the creation of two struggles, that of family with family, that of individual and individual” (*Explorations*, 270). Chadwick notes regarding this passage:

But what Yeats does not make explicit here is that only the ‘individual struggle,’ that struggle that does not assume preordained definitions of

identity rooted in familial tradition and social rank, can make possible (as well as necessary) the kind of self-invention in which he depicts both himself and his personae continually engaging (884)

Anyone might suggest meritocracy to supplement, with an obvious retort, Chadwick's observation of a weakness in Yeats's conception of social order. After all, every aristocratic family at its genesis was built upon the strength and ingenuity rooted in individual struggle. To this, Yeats would argue that an especial quality to the family struggle is cumulative; it hones the merit of each member of the aristocratic family by generations of familial accountability to excellence and sophistication. Poetically, he terms this "the ceremony of innocence" in "The Second Coming" (*Collected Poems* 187, 6). Yet, Yeats seems to insist there is a specific kind of genius available also within the community of peasants. Though the many must be ruled in an Antithetical era, the personality, or genius, of an individual must not be extinguished in a homogeneous throng of Primary Fascist nationalism.

The individual genius of the peasant is shown in Yeats's later work when he supplies us impoverished, mad, old characters such as Crazy Jane, who, Chadwick argues, that by "the violence of their rhetoric and tone" are vigorously self-inventing and direct parodies of his Antithetical heroes (882-83, 885). An earlier example of such provincial genius occurs in his 1903 play *The Hour-Glass*, which features a Wise Man and a Fool. The Wise Man upon his death concludes "Ay, to a frenzy of the mind, / For all that we have done's undone / Our speculation but as the wind (*The Hour-Glass* 6). The Wise Man, who had thought all men were fools until he taught them repents of his materialist teachings and does not become truly wise until he mirrors the spiritual knowledge of The

Fool. Fleming argues, “[The Fool] has imagination, which saves him from coming under the influence of the Wise Man’s materialistic teaching (145). Though I do not agree that Yeats extends a full mobility of individuation to the poor, that is, mobility comparable to that which he makes intrinsic to his romanticized aristocrats, the point remains that Yeats makes evident a particular quality of humanity that exists among subjects ruled. This romanticized peasant is not activated in the Fascists’ collectivism. The Fascists’ popular nationalism perpetuates mediocrity, intellectual hatred, and antagonistic zeal toward common enemies to provide common values to link the populace. But Yeats does not imagine Fascism’s fervid and uninspired popular nationalism is appropriate to diminish class differences. Rather, Yeats celebrates a social gap as he suggests virtuosity in the plebeians occupying their proper social class fully and without mass-pretention to be anything but what they already are.

Antithetical individuation is reserved for the leisured aristocrats. Consequently, in the Antithetical influx, the masses ideally surrender self-governance. If not, they are conquered. Yeats wrote, “It will become the duty of the educated classes to seize and control one or more of those necessities. The drilled and docile masses may submit but a prolonged civil war seems more likely, with the victory of the skillful, riding their machines as did feudal knights their armored horses” (*Explorations* 425-26). Yeats preferred the masses submit because to him, it is the aristocracy that establishes excellence in civilization with benefits trickling down to those below as necessary.

A flaw Chadwick finds in Yeats’s notion of a hierarchical social order shows that his valuing of individuality actually lends itself to some sympathy with democracy. The artist, aristocrat, and heroic figure typify the Antithetical figure who pursues what Yeats

termed the “Mask.” Such a self-actualizing aristocrat uses leisure and freedom to develop sundry advancements in culture. Chadwick notes that being highborn is integral to this part of the system, and he states that the heroic [or “tragic”] Mask “represents an anti-democratic model of individuality, a programmatic gesture of opposition to liberal-democratic social political structures” (880-81). Individuation is reserved for aristocratic classes, and this is non-egalitarian. Yet, “the very process of constructing that mask... binds it to the liberal-democratic society it ostensibly opposes... [the Antithetical figure participates] in the social dynamic central to the democratic-individualist order: dynamic self-invention” (880-883). His support of self-invention opposes the Primary formula of Fascist popular nationalism. Despite Yeats’s single yet significant democratic sympathy, he represented dynamic self-invention as a privilege of the aristocratic class.

Yeats wrote that “Individuality had produced vulgarity – commonness” (882). He found that “democratic individuality disguise[ed] an underlying uniformity,” that leads to “the modern ‘simulation and condonation of revolutionary massacre and the multiplication of murderous weapons” (qtd. in 882). The democratic fervor of the French and Bolshevik Revolutions likely had been the images of inspiration for this comment. Yet, Yeats’s comment is relevant to Fascism because he shows disgust for the mob-passion of the Primary that was provoked by Fascist nationalism for the sake of manufacturing war. Stanfield writes that Yeats abandoned the Irish Fascism of the Blueshirts that had given him some hope of an authoritarian Ireland sooner than he turned from Fascist politics altogether because his false impression of the Antithetical nature of Mussolini’s government endured. Chadwick states, “Irish Fascism, Yeats discovered, could not be made to take the philosophical stance he believed Italian Fascism had adopted. There was nothing

in it of the completed Antithetical personality, whether of the company or the individual” (74). The false nature became apparent to him, particularly the intellectual hatred and commonness of the Fascist society, but before he arrived at this rejection after 1936 he was influenced by the political facade that appeared to him as possible Antithetical virtue.

We have an idealization which Stanfield designates “Yeatsian fascist.” This scholarly invention is proximal to the poet’s precious Antithetical aristocrat.

Yeats’s idea of the fascist corresponds in some obvious ways to his idea of the aristocrat. Like the Yeatsian aristocrat, the Yeatsian fascist is formed from within rather than from without, honours the past, scorns hatred. A fascist society, having arrived by reason at these virtues, would be prepared to honour the inexplicable, unfathomable ‘forces’ that actually produce society, the family and the individual (74)

After Yeats had time to scrutinize Fascist society, the “obedience, conformity, and intolerance of dissent” that clinical psychologist I. W. Charny diagnoses as “the fascist slave” became unappealingly clear (97). Yeats’s notion that Fascism, arriving with the Antithetical influx, could lead to a recasting of settings conducive to “unique irreplaceable individuals” of “old humanity” was dashed by discerning the hatred and conventionality of the movement. Fascism could not provide a dawning of the new era of Antithetical rule with opulent aristocrats lording wisely over quaint and bucolic commoners.

Yeats gives us an illustrative metaphor of the Antithetical dream that Fascism fails to achieve in his poem “Ancestral Houses.” Upon an estate built by “Some violent bitter man, some powerful man” there is a fountain by which “life overflows without ambitious pains; / And rains down life until the basin spills” (*Collected Poems* 200, 19, 3-4).



This fountain of self-fashioning creativity that “choose[es] whatever shape it will,” represents Yeats’s aristocrat. Civilization itself can well-be the “rich man’s flowering lawns” nourished by the outflowing of creativity and resolve against any adversity as the fountain “mounts more dizzy high the more it rains” (*Collected Poems* 200, 1, 5).

George Orwell criticized Yeats’s poetry and philosophy, alleging there was a “fascistic tendency” in the poet’s aristocratic snobbery. Despite Orwell’s analysis being based on a heuristic of “tendency,” the distinguished anti-totalitarian polemicist is trenchant in illustrating how Yeats’s aspirations for noble despotism (which Orwell opines is an intriguing naivety) both lead to and problematize Fascism: “...he fails to see that the new authoritarian civilisation if it arrives, will not be aristocratic, or what he means by aristocratic. It will not be ruled by noblemen with Van Dyck faces, but by anonymous millionaires, shiny-bottomed bureaucrats and murdering gangsters” ([georgeorwellnovels.com](http://georgeorwellnovels.com)). Yeats indeed came to find Fascism left much to be desired of his wished-for influx of civilization. Yet, his rejection of Fascism does not mitigate the antidemocratic sentiment entrenched in his vision of the Antithetical dispensation. Yeats’s nationalism was authoritarian. “Yeats lays bare the central reality of Fascism, which the whole of its propaganda is designed to cover up. The merely political Fascist claims always to be fighting for justice: Yeats, the poet, sees at a glance that Fascism means injustice, and acclaims it for that very reason” ([georgeorwellnovels.com](http://georgeorwellnovels.com)). Yeats was drawn to Fascism in preparation for aristocratic tyranny.

## Contrasts between the Aristocratic Rule of the Antithetical and the Leadership of a Fascist State

Fascist nationalism celebrated power and elitism. Fascism was hierarchical, and at the top of the elite class was an illustrious leader. Though this Fascist nationalistic vision seemed to hold potential for a manifestation of Yeats's Antithetical fantasy government in Ireland, Fascist elitism could not ultimately emulate, or make way for, Yeats's vision for national leadership. The Fascist environment of Primary power worship could not supply his specific vision of a national pure-blooded aristocracy.

Authoritarianism in an Antithetical condition, and Antithetical despotism would be perpetuated under the rule of an aristocratic family. According to Kallis, the de facto institutionalism and polyocracy of the Third Reich effectively resembles a neo-feudalist aristocracy ("Nazi Propaganda Decision Making" 63-64). Kallis states, "The Nazi state depended on a retreat to medieval notions of faith (*Ehre*), commitment (*Gefolgschaft*), and loyalty (*Treue*)," and the separate networks within Nazi government resembled fiefdoms (63, 65). Stanfield writes that this elitism is similar to Yeats's idea that surpassingly skilled individuals must rule as a kindred. He was always interested in "highly trained intellectuals" forming an "expert government," and this is a reason he placed some hope of Antithetical leadership in Fascist regimes (55). One important difference is Yeats envisioned government as a family tradition. According to Frazier, "The picturesque Ireland which Yeats loved and sang was a feudal aristocracy governed by the Old Protestant families..." (69). Yeats believed "the State was a tree, no mechanism to be pulled to pieces and put up again, but an oak tree that had grown through the centuries" (qtd in Stanfield 42). The ideal of dynastic custom that helped that state grow and flourish like a tree is of the essence to an Antithetical government.

Yeats's "ceremony of innocence" in "The Second Coming" is a poetic term that may be glossed as an 'aristocratic tradition of the pure-blooded' (*The Collected Poems* 187, 6). "Innocence" equates to a purity that is cultivated by the exclusivity of aristocratic family tradition. Yeats was infatuated with time-honed tradition and family structure as the grand political arrangement of the Antithetical ideal. In "A Prayer for My Daughter" Yeats asks:

How but in custom and in ceremony  
 Are innocence and beauty born?  
 Ceremony's a name for the rich horn,  
 And custom for the spreading laurel tree (*Collected Poetry*188)

Fascist hierarchies were meritocratic in their development of elite leadership, and they could not emulate the perpetual convention and hermetic exclusivity of the Antithetical political structure. Allison claimed that Yeats desired the posterity of sophisticated tradition, and he believed the traditions of landed gentry could "stem the tide of mediocrity" (192). The idealized ascendancy also provided leisure to cultivate great things.

The merit of the elite individual fascinated Yeats, but the oligarchical rule he favored was one of inheritance. He believed excellent rule was groomed and delivered in a manner similar to an artisan's legacy. In "Yeats and Politics," Allison asserts that Yeats modeled "passionate recklessness, long tradition, and the capacity to create 'beautiful things' in poems that expressed the motif of the 'Big House'" (190-91). Allison notes that in "Upon a House Shaken by the Land Agitation," "the house synthesizes passion and intellect, implicit in Yeatsian ideas of Unity of Being" with the lines:

How should the world be luckier if this house,

Where passion and precision have been one  
 Time out of mind, became too ruinous  
 To breed the lidless eye that loves the sun? (191)

In a mixed metaphor that evokes both the nurturing fountain in “Ancestral Houses,” and suggests the creative aesthetic of the artist as demonstrated in the skill of an architect, Yeats describes the Antithetical aristocrat as a political patron: “the great statesman is the gardener of a people...[building] from the top storey downwards” (qtd. in Nally 336). Fascism was too new to transform into a rule by blood, though he initially hoped for that very potential to branch from its authoritarianism. In contrast to the overwhelming influence the state and its leader held over a member of the Fascist elite, the Antithetical aristocrat chose patronage by a private whim.

Because the Antithetical mind obeys its own discipline, Yeats was convicted that the ruling class may take private delight in advancing civilization purely because they were proficient to do so. The unreality of this logic, upheld by his interpretation of history and biography in *A Vision*, can be charitably interpreted as an example of Yeats’s viewing politics from the subjective and creative point of view of the Antithetical. The poet’s aesthetic vision of politics – his sense of political “beauty” deferential to pecking order – makes an assumption that valiant benevolence will provide governance; accordingly, he likewise accepts tyrannical domination as inevitable of such authority. His hope for the Antithetical era was in dynastic clans imposing discipline to reverse cultural decay. The despair of degeneration consumed Yeats at the end of his life, and this tone is central to *New Poems* and *Last Poems* released in 1938-1939.

Yeats was intellectually active, and he formed his aesthetic philosophy during the High Victorian period when the pseudo-science of degenerationism was at its peak (Watson 36). During the *fin de siècle* era of 19th century Europe, the influence of degenerationists such as B.A. Morel, T.H. Huxley, Ernst Haeckel, and Jean-Baptiste Lamarck pervaded to create a mass-alarm that inferior breeding and strenuous environments could cause an individual to morbidly deviate from the normal biological or mental organization that provides its design (Taylor & Shuttleworth). This milieu in which Yeats cultivated his mind progressed into Nazi modernity. Paxton states that “Nazi ‘racial cleansing’ built upon the purifying impulses of twentieth-century medicine and public health, the eugenicists’ eagerness to weed out the unfit and the unclean, an aesthetic of the perfect body, and a scientific rationality that rejected moral criteria as irrelevant” (13). Yeats specifically desired a genetically pure aristocratic class, and he felt affluent society had been tainted by intermarrying with the middle class. In “The Old Stone Cross,” Yeats provides a speaker dressed in a golden breast plate who rebukes the degeneration of society:

Because this age and the next age

Engender in the ditch,

No man can know a happy man

From any passing wretch

If folly link with Elegance

No man knows which is which (*Collected Poems* 190, 7-14)

This fervid endogamy and disgust with the genetic other draws connotations to the racial theory and design of Fascist Germany. The ethnic cleansing of the Holocaust was racially

motivated, but Yeats was not anti-Semitic or racist. Though Yeats esteemed the English traditions, Ireland may be considered a postcolonial nation from the perspective of Yeats's efforts to create a national sense of Irish selfhood against British domination. This may be a reason why he held sympathy for the Indians under imperial occupation. This sympathy with the racial other shows the divergence between the eugenicist concerns of the Nazi's and his own. Though both Yeats's and Fascist nationalism espouse the need for pure blood to triumph, Yeats's championing of eugenics relates to the Antithetical notion of aristocracy where Nazi eugenics is concerned with Aryan racial hygiene.

Yeats consulted the British Eugenics Society for his infamous 1939 pamphlet *On the Boiler* (17). In this pamphlet, he railed against degeneration in Ireland, and he included in the closing of his pamphlet his short play *Purgatory* (39). In the play, an old man and his son arrive at a ruined ancestral house, and the old man grievously tells the story of how his maternal family line plunged into degeneration when his mother married his common father from lust. He admits to murdering his father, then he kills his son with that same knife to prevent further degeneration (45). Though Yeats did not include notions of racial superiority in *A Vision*, the murderous culling of *Purgatory* bears an uncomfortable resemblance to the racial purification that took place under the German demonstration of Fascism. Harold Bloom writes that this issue "hardly makes the play less powerful, but we ought to resent a work that has so palpable a design upon us. Eugenic tendentiousness is not a formula for great art, even in Yeats" (429). The importance of aristocratic breeding is nonetheless significant to the influx of the Antithetical new age.

Yeats illustrates this exigency for aristocratic breeding as an intuitive directive, or even a lordly quest for supremacy, in “Hound Voice,” published in 1939. “Some few half wake and half renew their choice, / Give tongue, proclaim their hidden name – ‘hound voice” (*Collected Poems* 341, 6-7). This arcane awakening represents a eugenic drive to strengthen aristocratic stock for the crises that will break out at the shifting of the Antithetical and Primary gyres. This preparation for crises reflects Michael Robartes’s warning in *A Vision* to “prepare your children...[for war] for how can a nation or a kindred without war become that ‘bright particular star.” “Hound Voice” proposes an intuitive, almost divinatory, sexual drive for the sake of genetic fortification against a looming apocalyptic incident:

We picked each other from afar and knew  
 What hour of terror comes to test the soul,  
 And in that terror’s name obeyed the call,  
 And understood, what none have understood,  
 Those images that waken in the blood (10-14)

Yeats’s idea of the Antithetical seems to permit his potential identification with Nazi Fascism through a shared fascination with eugenics and the proposal of a wide genetic divide. Yeats defined the Antithetical era as one of “kindred,” and the foremost definition relates to a close family bond. However, “kindred” is also relevant to the idea of aristocracy if we are to accept a supplementary meaning of like-mindedness, or shared pursuit, among a coterie. Yeats and Hitler’s government sought the perfectibility of a master race, so this seems like a kindred pursuit of genetic purity. But, Yeats’s vision was less racial and founded more overtly on cultural identity. Though culture carries ethnic associations,

Yeats's cultural bigotry is not sufficiently comparable to the precise racial prejudice of Nazism. The overarching desire of Nazi racial purity was to generate a "master race" based upon confidence in a community-centered Germanic wholesomeness. It was a racial-ized collectivism. Yeats was concerned with the genetic posterity of the few. Thus, it is not racism but classism that Yeats's promulgates directly and unapologetically. It is not feasible to interpret racial hatred from bias within the system of *A Vision*. Still, it remains important to recognize Yeats's appeals to expeditious and violent solutions as the best remedy for biological shortfall. The final lines of "Hound Voice" ring with an uncomfortably familiar tenor to us who live post-Holocaust unlike Yeats, who died just after the beginning of World War II. Yeats ends "Hound Voice" by writing,

Stumbling upon the blood-dark track once more,  
 That stumbling to the kill beside the shore;  
 Then cleaning out and bandaging wounds,  
 And chants of victory amid the encircling hounds (18-21)

Here, Yeats offers the poetic symbolism of a lethal hunt resulting from the spiritual and biological reclamation of noble authority. The symbolism rays out further from connotations of triumph over democracy. This poem, if we are to take much of Yeats's rhetoric from his late work seriously, symbolizes also a vicious genetic entitlement. Stanfield writes of Yeats's view of the Antithetical aristocrat: "Certain men, Yeats thought, possessed the ability to judge and act quickly and rightly without becoming bogged in doubt and without having to consult authority external to themselves..." (43). This quality is of utmost importance to Fascist movements.



Mussolini and Hitler appeared to be gifted messianic figures who promised “new men” and a new world, so they centralized their governments around the *Führerprinzip*, or “leadership principle” (*History of Fascism* 160, Paxton 141). Yeats described the period between the Hellenistic Antithetical era prior to the Primary dispensation of Christ in *A Vision*: “all about it is an antithetical aristocratic civilization in its completed form, every detail of life hierarchical, every great man’s door crowded at dawn by petitioners, great wealth everywhere in a few man’s hands, all dependent upon a few...” (277). This hierarchical society with a great leader at the top permits an Antithetical allure. The Fascist leadership principle seems Antithetical as “ample evidence exists that the enthusiasm among the people for Hitler was genuine and the Italian archives are full of direct appeals to the Duce for favors from workers and peasants” (de Grand 76).

On a visit to Ezra Pound, Yeats finished *A Vision* in Capri during February of 1925, the third year of Mussolini’s reign (Alldritt 292-293). Yeats considered Italy as a potential model for Fascist rule in Ireland as early as 1922 largely because he was impressed with Mussolini as an intuitive and firm Antithetical ruler (Stanfield 58-59). Stanfield writes, “Not only did Mussolini seem an Antithetical ruler, but he also seemed clear-eyed enough to see and hard headed enough to employ to his advantage the cruelty, or barbarity, that seemed to have permanently entered European life...” (59). Yeats admired Irish senators that displayed the Antithetical qualities he saw in Mussolini such as self-sufficiency, self-imposed duty, and a sense of connection with the past (56). These aristocratic qualities of self-possession were ostensible in Hitler and Mussolini, but many of Yeats’s direct examples were Irish public men. He had been impressed by a coterie of “old lawyers, old bankers, old businessmen” who he had purportedly witnessed doing

nothing more than raise their voices that they might be heard over the ruckus of an armed attack upon an adjacent building (*A Vision* 26-27). Yeats saw in such figures a tragic and dramatic potential for Irish politics to come alive as Antithetical, so he hoped for leaders like Il Duce to emerge from the Protestant Ascendancy. Yeats often assessed specific statesmen and artists in Ireland for Antithetical qualities. Most specifically, he cast Parnell as the Antithetical hero and exemplar toward which Ireland should look for headship. Debora Fleming places Yeats's approval of violent authoritarianism under the umbrella of his passion for gentry when she notes "[Yeats] worked with Ireland's 'strong-man' Kevin O'Higgins, the minister of justice for the Free State government, who was thought to be a ruthless supporter of the propertied party and capital punishment" (143). His affinity for stout and decisive political characters reflects his desire for national discipline and authority. Stanfield writes that Antithetical rulers "...had to be 'inquisitors,' 'implacable,' 'firm,' 'tyrannical,' 'surgical,' to use the words Yeats was using in these years" (59). In a letter to his close friend Olivia Shakespeare, Yeats claims to have been working with "an ex-Cabinet Minister, an eminent lawyer, and a philosopher, to work out a social theory which can be used against Communism in Ireland- what looks like emerging is Fascism modified by religion" (qtd. in Stanfield).

The plan to align himself with other people of supremacy for the development a Fascist social theory never came to fruition. Yet, Yeats's support for the escalating Blueshirt movement also confirms his infatuation with strong leadership as he writes "A Fascist opposition is forming behind the scenes to be ready should some tragic situation develop. I find myself constantly urging the despotic rule of the educated classes...I know half a dozen men any one of whom may be Caesar – or Catiline" (qtd. in O'Brian

35-36). Yeats understood Spengler's *Decline of the West* to be a serendipitous confirmation of his system developed in *A Vision*. Spengler's "Caesarism," which very likely influenced the Nazi's *Führerprinzip*, illustrates Yeats's Antithetical notion of outstanding individual leadership and the coming influx of the Antithetical age.

The chaos [of the old order] gives forth a new and overpowering factor that penetrates to very elementals of Becoming – the Caesar-men... The powers of the blood, unbroken bodily forces, resume their ancient lordship. "Race" springs forth, pure and irresistible – the strongest win and the residue is their spoil. They seize the management of the world, and the realm of the books and problems petrifies or vanishes from memory... Once the Imperial Age arrived, there are no more political problems... (Spengler qtd. in Nally 333)

Nally ultimately links this notion of Antithetical lords or "Caesar-men" rising up to seize the world to Yeats's occult principles. She writes that "it is this desire for strong leadership which in an occult formula, develops into the role of the avatar (in Hinduism, this is the descent of a deity from heaven to earth, and Theosophy continues with this tradition) (333). This occult element is too exact to permit relationship with the neo-feudal polyocracy of elites or even the practical principle of *Führerprinzip* in Fascism. In fact, Nally writes "characteristically peculiar, [Yeats and his wife George] believed that the avatar would be incarnated in their first-born child, pointing to an early union of eugenical breeding, the search for aristocratic lineage, and the occult" (333). The hope for an Antithetical avatar adds an esoteric dimension to Yeats's admiration of blood lineage and strong leadership.

Though Yeats had turned from traditional Christian religion as a boy, and considered religion a moralizing element of Primary culture, “he was a man of profoundly religious temperament” (Norton 1). Beginning with an interest in Celtic mythology and Eastern mysticism, Yeats eventually advanced his interest in spiritualism and the paranormal by joining the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. He remained an authoritative member for life (Forster). Claire V. Nally provides the fascinating insight into Yeats’s faith that his son will be a particular kind of Antithetical champion, and it expands our understanding of his ideas. Yeats’s interest in Hitler and especially Mussolini was based on his Antithetical fascination with aptitude, but his occult influence provided him a notion of a strong leader beyond what mere Fascism could provide. According to Nally, Yeats’s Antithetical champion was an avatar, or human incarnation of the Antithetical ideal. Nally writes, “As a counter to the degeneration of the nation, Yeats posits the Irish avatar. Most worrying is the proto-fascist political inflection which this occult figure provides. It relates to a solitary, independent and implicitly despotic leader, one who emerges from the masses but is not of them (334). However, the avatar is more than a proto-Fascist. In “A Nativity” Yeats gives us an account of the birth of this Antithetical avatar, and the final two lines exemplify an inborn despotic nature that sets the child apart from normalcy and makes it truly and horribly fey: “Why is the woman terror-struck? / Can there be mercy in that look? (*Collected Poems* 344, 11-12). Though Hitler and Mussolini were tyrants, the birth of the avatar seems something else entirely. The newborn avatar of “A Nativity” is the Nietzschean *Übermensch*. Its merciless look recalls the “gaze blank and pitiless as the sun” of the troubling sphinx in “The Second Coming;” that “rough beast” whom, at the appointed moment in history, “Slouches towards Bethlehem to be

born” (*Collected Poems* 187, 15, 21-22). That the Yeatses expected the avatar to be the identity of their actual child shows that Yeats’s commitment to a rising Antithetical era was a very personal and mystic notion. The idiosyncratic and arcane nature of Yeats’s thinking is significant because such an idea that the great Antithetical leader would be born from his household is very subjective and imaginative. Again, Primary Fascism was too pragmatic and focused on the populace to satiate Yeats’s Antithetical vision of aristocratic family. The system of *A Vision*, though posited by the poet and occultist as legitimately theoretical, was, according to his own account, revealed to him by otherworldly “instructors.” Contrary to Yeats’s exclusivist bloodline-obsession that waxed mystic upon a proverbial “chosen one,” Nazi racialism was focused on the public identity of an Aryan race. Even worshipful adoration of a Fascist leader could not completely represent the mystic gap between an inferior populace and the Antithetical avatar.

The intensity of Yeats’s hope for divine progeny is perhaps present to some degree in the “new man” rhetoric of Fascism for its palingenetic ideology, but it is dubious that Yeats recognized either Hitler or Mussolini as vanguards after he determined the Fascist cultivation of what Nally calls “artificial unity” (340). The Primary character of the Fascist nation reveals their leadership principle as merely politics. Yeats, however, claimed that he was “a forerunner of that horde that will some day come down the mountains” (qtd. in Nally 333). That he would be a prophet of an amoral race of ultra-aristocrats, with his son an Antithetical antichrist, raises eyebrows when considered from the perspective that pre-war Fascism did not perhaps seem high-handed enough for him. Accordingly, it is proper to concede that Yeats died before he witnessed the extreme na-

ture of the Second World War, though his preoccupation with hierarchy seems extreme. Majorie Howes writes:

On a theoretical level that coincides with the grand historical scale of *A Vision*, Yeats accepts both democracy and authority, individual and race, equally, as the necessary and interdependent faces of an important historical and political antinomy. Ethically, he was no less committed to his own version of values like intellectual initiative and individual liberty than he was to family strength and inherited wealth. (qtd. by Nally 340)

Yeats, after all, was a dreamer of power and peers of the realm. To Yeats, Fascism presented only a smokescreen of the values compatible with the Antithetical and could not make way for his fancied as Antithetical lords. The goosetep and roman salute could not conjure forth his great masters who built a sacred quest for supremacy upon gyre-granted destiny.

## Conclusion: The Antithetical Now

After “A Packet for Ezra Pound” in the beginning of *A Vision*, we arrive at “Stories of Michael Robartes and His Friends: An Extract from a Record Made by His Pupils.” Robartes looks upon his guests, and says “I want the right sort of young men and women for pupils” (37). He asks if they should discuss “art,” “war,” or “love.” Each of his three initiates declines in turn because they wish not to talk of work. That “art” “war” and “love” happen to be professions to each of Robartes’ prospective disciples proves Robartes has chosen aptly Antithetical pupils as students of Yeats’s theoretical system. By this triune of professions that make fitting pupils, one might guess Robartes could al-

so, as Yeats had initially, appreciate Fascism as Antithetical. Though we may interpret the character as a stand-in for Yeats himself, Robartes never mentions Fascism in *A Vision*. Thus, a prerequisite talent in “art,” “war,” and “love” to qualify for an introduction into study of the system provides us a framework to examine Yeats’s interest in Fascism. As for art, the intrinsic nature of creativity defines the Antithetical, and the aesthetic and cultural programs of Fascism seemed to represent this. Even so, Fascist efforts to exert creative force upon the imagination of the populace are ultimately revealed as Primary methods of enforced conformity. Fascist nations praised war for the sake of change, and this palingenetic nationalism is Antithetical. However, the nationalistic fervor involved in Fascist war-mongering lacks receptivity to the dramatic that is embodied in the Yeatsian tragic-heroism of the Antithetical. Love is embodied in family tradition and aristocratic lineage in terms of the Antithetical. Aristocratic birth, the ceremony of innocence, and individual ability all spring from the Antithetical fountain of family. Love and Fascism, are best described as populist fervor. The nationalistic love or devotion to the leader is a Primary abandonment of selfhood. Yeats’s system does not permit a dedicated identification with Fascism. Rather, the Antithetical is, as a final point, contrary to Fascism.

Though not Fascist, the antidemocratic sentiments within *A Vision* haunt us. Yeats’s heritage as the great poet of his generation provides his posterity, but in a post-World War II civilization, we cannot fully shake our resentment or fear of him for his authoritarian values. By his excellence, he has set himself up as a monument and teacher. The apocalyptic violence of his work may insure his relevance as long as we fear threats against democracy such as those that civilization had survived just after he passed away. To speak for America, the findings from the momentous Princeton and Northwestern

study “Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens” released on April 19, 2014 assert that the United States has become an oligarchy (Gilens & Page). Yeats did not ceremoniously embrace Fascism, and his suggestion of a coming terror, an influx of the few over the many, make the dangerous business he undertook as a prophet seem unexpectedly less awkward. If some awful hour is at hand, the poet has at least furnished those who would hear him with the suggestion that we are fully present after we accept life as tragedy.



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