

William Butler Yeats and Phoebe Anna Traquair: Their Fascination with ‘Love’s Hour’ in Literature and Art

Yuki TAKAHASHI

1 Foreword

William Butler Yeats (1865–1939), the first Irishman to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature (1923), is nowadays known as one of the foremost literary figures of twentieth century Ireland. His life and work have been conventionally associated with the Celtic Revival, a cultural movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that inspired writers and artists to seek for themes and material in Ireland’s history. Yeats built his literary career within this nationalist climate, and came to be regarded as the leading icon of the Celtic Revival. However, as a painter’s son and one-time art school student, Yeats had a keen appreciation of the visual arts, and linking poetry with art was for him a central concern. Therefore, research to identify specific artworks that fascinated Yeats should provide a key to enrich the interpretation of his poems.

In 1906, Yeats had occasions to visit some of the major cities of Scotland.¹

¹ In his role as Director of the Abbey Theatre, in 1905–06 Yeats accompanied a theatrical tour of Britain that included a number of appearances in Scotland. See Roy Foster, *W.B. Yeats: A Life. Vol.I. The Apprentice Mage* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 347. Furthermore, in January of 1906 he gave a lecture in Dundee on ‘Literature and Living Voices’. See *The Courier*, 9 January 1906.

In June of that year, he wrote that 'Nearly all my time in Edinburgh I was absorbed in Mrs Traquair's work and find it far more beautiful than I had foreseen.'² He had been 'overwhelmed, astonished' by 'her extraordinary abundance of imagination'. Phoebe Anna Traquair (1852-1936) was a Dublin-born Scottish artist, a leading figure in the Arts and Crafts movement in Britain whose work encompassed mural painting, embroidery, manuscript illumination, book binding, and metal enamelling, all deeply imbued with mysticism and symbolism, and characterised by a Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic featuring rich colours and patterns.

Yeats and Traquair were influenced by the same artists and thinkers, such as William Blake (1757-1827), Walter Pater (1839-94), and particularly Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82). Traquair often portrayed Rossetti in her works, for example in a mural painting created in 1889 for the Song School of St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral in Edinburgh [Figure 1], in which Rossetti is depicted holding a little replica of his famous *Annunciation*. In Yeats's poetry, specifically in his early works written in the 1890s, the poetic expression of an ecstatic state of erotic love is a recurrent motif, and reminiscent of what Rossetti had poetised as 'Love's Hour'.³ Similarly, Traquair, who cited Rossetti as a source of both poetic and artistic inspiration, visualised the rapturous moments between lovers in her various craft works. The sensuous expression of love depicted in her artefacts shows an affinitive correspondence to the longing for the erotic experience evoked in Yeats's love poetry. By elucidating the corresponding representations of erotic love between these two artists' literature and art,

² Letter to Lady Augusta Gregory, in Colin Smythe, ed., *Seventy Years: Being the Autobiography of Lady Gregory* (Buckinghamshire: Gerrard Cross, 1974), 435. Hereafter cited as *Seventy Years*.

³ William Michael Rossetti, ed., *The Complete Poetical Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1905), 166. Hereafter cited as *R*.

Figure 1. The South Wall of The Song School in St. Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh.



(The Portrait of D. G. Rossetti)



this essay attempts to show how Yeats's highly visual imagination in correlation to contemporary craft arts was an important factor in sharpening his aesthetic sensitivity.

2 Yeats's Longing for Pre-Raphaelite Beauty

Recollecting his early life, Yeats wrote that he had learned to think in 'the midst of the last phase of Pre-Raphaelitism'.⁴ It was in this environment that Yeats deepened his interest in the synthesis of literature and art. Yeats's father, John Butler Yeats (1839–1922), had left a successful career as a barrister to concentrate on portrait painting, with his early style much influenced by Rossetti, the founding member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Even after his father's painting style had broken away from that of Rossetti, Yeats continued to long 'for Pre-Raphaelitism, for an art allied to poetry'.⁵ As has been demonstrated by Elizabeth Loizeaux, this yearning for the visionary and spiritual worlds of the Pre-Raphaelites cultivated Yeats's faith in a visual arts allied to literature,⁶ and provided him with a formative impulse in his literary creativity, that of the philosophical connection between visual art and poetry.⁷

It should be noted, however, that for Yeats 'Pre-Raphaelite' referred to the Arts and Crafts movement, which had emerged as an offspring of Pre-Raphaelitism in England in the late 1880s, then spread beyond national

⁴ William Butler Yeats, *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1961), 346. Hereafter cited as *E&I*.

⁵ William Butler Yeats, *Autobiographies* (London: Macmillan, 1980), 81. Hereafter cited as *Au*.

⁶ Elizabeth Bergman Loizeaux, 'Yeats and the Pre-Raphaelites', *Yeats and the Visual Arts* (London: Rutgers University Press, 1986), 6–33.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

borders, not least to Scotland and Ireland. Promoted by the socialist designer William Morris (1824–96), who emphasised 'applying art to articles of utility', it was both a reaction to the commercial forces of burgeoning capitalism, and an attempt to influence the aesthetic direction in life, industry, and education.⁸ Yeats met Morris for the first time in 1886, when the latter was in Dublin to present lectures on socialism.⁹ The following year, when Yeats moved to London, he joined the Socialist League meetings every Sunday at Morris's Kelmscott House in Hammersmith.¹⁰ Indeed, Yeats's attitude to art and literature owes much to his friendship with Morris in London in the late 1880s, and it was during this period that his early career as a poet was established.¹¹ As part of Morris's circle, Yeats met and communicated with many leading artists of the Arts and Crafts movement,¹² while artworks in Morris's mansion, such as Rossetti's painting *Proserpine* (1874), and a cupboard painted with an illustration by Edward Burne-Jones of a poem by medieval poet Geoffrey Chaucer, left a

⁸ William Morris, 'The Arts and Crafts of To-Day' (1889), *The Collected Works of William Morris*, vol. XXII (New York: Russell & Russell, 1966), 356.

⁹ They met at the Contemporary Club, organised by Charles Hubert Oldham in 1885 for the purpose of stimulating debate among Dublin intellectuals. See Catherine Fahy, *W.B. Yeats and his Circle* (Dublin: The National Library of Ireland, 1989), 12.

¹⁰ Yeats knew that Morris would have a lasting influence on him. Later in life he admitted that Morris was still his 'chief of men'. See *Au*, 141.

¹¹ When Yeats's first major work *The Wandering of Oisín* came out in 1889, he was delighted by Morris's comment that 'You write my sort of poetry'. See *Au*, 146.

¹² For example, Yeats met the designer and illustrator Walter Crane; Emery Walker and Cobden Sanderson, who were specialists in book making; Sidney Cockerel, secretary to the Kelmscott Press founded by Morris; and Selwyn Image, an illustrator and designer of stained glass. Among Morris's socialist circle were Hyndman, Kropotkin, and George B. Shaw. See *Au*, 140. See also Yuki Takahashi, *W.B. Yeats in the Irish Arts and Crafts Movement* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Aoyama Gakuin University, 2016), 52–53.

vivid impression on the poet's mind.¹³ Recollecting those days, Yeats wrote, 'I was in all things Pre-Raphaelite.'¹⁴ In October 1890, in an article entitled 'An Exhibition of William Morris' written for the *Providence Sunday Journal*,¹⁵ Yeats reviewed a curated collection of artefacts including tapestries, stained glass, printed books, and manuscript illumination, most of which had been created by artists he had met through Morris. Appreciating how these artefacts 'marked the regained freedom of the spirit and imagination of man in literature',¹⁶ Yeats described the exhibition as 'the long-waited-for deliverance of the decorative arts', and admired the high level of English craft art.¹⁷ Considering such early experiences related to art and literature, it is no surprise that even after the turn of the century, when Yeats observed Phoebe Traquair's artworks he found Pre-Raphaelite beauty or, to be more precise, Rossettian beauty.

3 Phoebe Anna Traquair

Phoebe Anna Traquair, née Moss, was born in Dublin in 1852, the third daughter of a medical family. In the late 1860s she started to receive art training at the Royal Dublin Society, where she gained a reputation for outstanding sense and ability. These good reports led to an introduction to Scottish palaeontologist Dr Ramsay Heatley Traquair (1840-1912), a professor of Zoology at the Royal College of Science in Dublin, who was

¹³ *Au*, 140. Yeats mistakenly referred to this work as 'Pomegranate' because the model (Jane Morris) was shown holding a pomegranate, the symbol of Hades.

¹⁴ *Au*, 114.

¹⁵ John P. Frayne, ed., *Uncollected Prose by W. B. Yeats*. vol.1 (London: Macmillan, 1970), 182-86. Hereafter cited as *UP1*.

¹⁶ *UP1*, 183.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 186. See also Takahashi, 54-55.

seeking an assistant to make fossil sketches for him. They married in 1873, and in 1874, up on Dr Traquair's appointment as keeper of the Royal Scottish Museum, the couple settled in Edinburgh.¹⁸

It is probable that after her marriage Phoebe Traquair's career was developed in circumstances by no means desirable for artistic pursuit.¹⁹ Yeats reported in 1906 that 'for a time she was forbidden to paint'.²⁰ Nevertheless, even in the years devoted to raising her children, her independent spirit resulted in developing networks through negotiating commissions and participating in exhibitions.²¹ These activities were not restricted to major Scottish cities like Edinburgh and Glasgow. For example, in 1895 her work was included in the first exhibition of the Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland, where her large triptych of silk embroidery, *The Salvation of Mankind* (1886–93), was valued for its 'broadness of treatment, decorative feeling, colour, and dexterity in dealing with a difficult material'.²² In 1899, she participated for the first time in the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society in London. From then on, she was a regular visitor to the capital city as a member of the British Arts and Crafts community. In 1902, Traquair's grand-scaled embroidery work *The Progress of a Soul* (1893–1902) was displayed at the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative Art in Turin. Consisting of four large panels, this embroidery series was based on the key concepts of Walter Pater's

¹⁸ For Phoebe Traquair's early life, see Elizabeth Cumming, *Phoebe Anna Traquair 1852–1936* (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland in association with National Museums Scotland, 2005. rpt. 2011), 13–14.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

²⁰ *Seventy Years*, 435.

²¹ Cumming, *op.cit.*, 10, 13.

²² *Journal and Proceedings of the Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland* (1896), 26. See also Paul Larmour, *The Arts & Crafts Movement in Ireland* (Belfast: Friar's Bush Press, 1992), 27.

Imaginary Portraits (1887). In 1904, these quartet panels were exhibited at the World's Fair in St Louis. Thus, by the 1900s Traquair had achieved international recognition of her remarkable achievement, and secured her position as an unrivalled figure in the Arts and Crafts movement.²³

During this period Traquair came into contact with artistic and intellectual ideas that deepened her interests in arts and literature, providing her with new sources of inspiration. John Miller Gray (1850-94), the first curator of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, introduced Traquair to writers and artists including the Scottish Pre-Raphaelite painter William Bell Scott, the poet Robert Browning, and Walter Pater, whose belief in 'art for art's sake' became a doctrine of Aestheticism.²⁴ These experiences provided Traquair with a constant subject, which her biographer Elizabeth Cumming best summarised as to 'celebrate the potential of the human mind.'²⁵ Along with the classic literature of Dante, Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barret Browning, Alfred Tennyson, Blake, Pater, and the New Testament, she valued the poetry and art of Rossetti, especially for the expression of a spiritual vision and the sensuality of life attained through exploring the identity of the human soul.

4 'The Drama of the Soul'

Yeats said of Traquair's works that 'she had but one story, the drama of the soul. She herself describes it as captivity, the divine descent to meet it, its liberation, its realisation of itself in the world of spirit.'²⁶ It should be

²³ Cumming, *op.cit.*, 71-72.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁶ *Seventy Years*, 435.

noted that this account of 'the drama of the soul' must have been based upon Yeats's knowledge of Swedenborgian ideas: as a passionate reader of Rossetti's poems in his youth, Yeats had realised that Swedenborg's concept of 'Conjugal Love' informed *The Blessed Damozel* and some of *The House of Life* sonnets.²⁷ As Pamela Bickley points out, Rossetti's explication on 'the correspondence of all things in heaven with the mortal world'²⁸ parallels Yeats's own account of the soul:

The soul embarks upon a period, either short or long, when it lives a life so like that of the world that it may not even believe that it has died... [Those] who have loved...see one another in the unfolding of a dream, believing that their lips are joined in a kiss.²⁹

Traquair had acquired the same philosophical notion through the Swedenborgian poet and homeopathic physician Garth Wilkinson (1812–99).³⁰ As Cumming demonstrates, Traquair's early mural paintings of the mortuary chapel at the Royal Hospital for Sick Children in Edinburgh are deeply related to Wilkinson's poems, and to Rossetti's poetical works. It is these paintings that Yeats praised as 'her most beautiful work'.³¹ Close

²⁷ Pamela Bickley, "How They Met Themselves: Rossetti and Yeats in the 1890's", Warwick Gould, ed., *Yeats's Annual*, vol.14 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 84.

²⁸ *Ibid.* Brickly points out that Rossetti's notion of 'correspondence' is clarified in his *Heaven and Hell* (1843).

²⁹ William Butler Yeats, *Explorations* (London: Macmillan, 1962), 34–6. Cited by Bickley, 102.

³⁰ Garth Wilkinson is remembered today for his treating Rossetti's wife Elizabeth Siddal. In the 1880s, Traquair illuminated two of Wilkinson's poems, *A Little Message for My Wife* (1884) and *Improvisation for the Spirit* (1887), as a personal gift for John Miller Gray. See Cumming, 17.

³¹ *Seventy Years*, 435.

observation of their motifs show the ideas condensed in 'the drama of the soul'; that is, the common ideas shared between Yeats and Traquair through Rossetti's poetry.

Traquair's mural decoration of the mortuary chapel at the Royal Hospital for Sick Children was part of an urban improvement project promoted by the Edinburgh Social Union.³² The artist took two years to transform the hospital's abandoned coalhouse, measuring only twelve square metres, into a sacred space of solace for the families who had lost their beloved children in the squalid conditions of Edinburgh's Old Town. The detail of its interior shows happy children and cherubs, with animals, fish, and birds as God's creations.³³ Every corner of this small space is filled with subjects representing what Cumming describes as 'the human spirit and its development through life to the point of death – and beyond.'³⁴ For example, it depicts the chained souls of sick children being raised up by angels (See **Figure 2**), with the inscription 'Death is the author of Life'. Surely such a progress of the human soul matches Yeats's description of 'the drama of the soul'.³⁵

³² The Union was founded in 1885 by Patrick Geddes (1854-1932), an environmentalist and town-planner, and professor of Botany at University College, Dundee. In the same year, Traquair was commissioned by two members of the Union: J.R. Findlay, director of the Children's Hospital, and benefactor of John Miller Gray's Scottish National Portrait Gallery (see Cumming, *op.cit.*, 20), and J.M. Gray.

³³ For a full discussion of biblical motifs and references in the chapel decoration, see Elizabeth Cumming, 'Phoebe Anna Traquair: Angels and Changing Concepts of the Supernatural in *fin-de-siècle* Scotland', in P. Jupp and S. Buckham, eds., *Death in Modern Scotland, 1855-1955: beliefs, attitudes and practices* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2016), 14-15, 17.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁵ In 1890 the hospital was abandoned due to the outbreak of typhoid, and in 1895 the mortuary chapel was demolished. Traquair's mural paintings were carried by horse and cart to the current hospital premises on the south edge of the meadows in Edinburgh. Most of the paintings were restored to their

Figure 2. The entrance mural of The Mortuary Chapel,
The Royal Hospital for Sick Children, Edinburgh.



'Death is the author of Life.'

In Traquair's artistic response to the concept behind the chapel, maternal compassion is blended with her visual interpretation of Rossetti's poem *The Blessed Damozel*. This poem tells of the separation by death of a woman, now spirit, and a man still bound to earthly life, where their longed-for visionary union also symbolises the salvation of the human soul. In the passage that inspired Traquair most directly, Rossetti wrote:

original condition by the artist herself in 1898, and others were newly reproduced. Yeats's visit in 1906 was to the second location of the hospital. See *Ibid.*, 12-13.

Around her, lovers, newly met
 'Mid deathless love's acclaims,
 Spoke evermore among themselves
 Their heart-remembered names;
 And the souls mounting up to God
 Went by her like thin flames.³⁶

Cumming points out that the term 'deathless love' in this passage 'could be applied equally to a parent-child relationship as to lovers'.³⁷ Corresponding to the final two lines of this scene, on the north wall Traquair painted flaming comets, representing human souls, rushing one by one 'from the hands of the Creator'³⁸ (**Figure 3-1**); from here these comet souls proceed to make a circuit around the chapel's walls. According to Cumming's account, the souls' spiritual journey continues through their life on earth, where they are seen entwined with a serpent as a symbol of eternity (**Figure 3-2**), and return to God's hands waiting at the north wall (**Figure 3-3**).³⁹ Furthermore, Cumming explains, 'the form of the soul changes from single to double figures as they become "conscious of their spiritual side during the life of earth, they return with double powers, accompanied, so to speak, by the higher nature which was still underdeveloped when they came from God"'.⁴⁰ Finally, these souls are welcomed into the arms of red-winged

³⁶ R, 3 (Stanza 7). *The Blessed Damozel* was first published in 1850, and subsequently revised and republished alone in 1856, 1870 and 1873. In this essay, citations of all Rossetti poems are from this edition by his younger brother William Michael Rossetti.

³⁷ Cumming, *op.cit.*, 16.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

³⁹ I am very grateful to Dr Cumming for generously acting as my guide to these mural decorations on my visit to the Royal Edinburgh Hospital for Sick Children in September 2017.

⁴⁰ Cumming's detailed account of the soul's journey in these mural paintings is

angels, shown standing on each side of Mother Mary and the Infant Christ, representing 'motherhood' (**Figure 3-4**). In this principal panel, pairs of angel and human soul in female form are embracing, an image Traquair explained as 'a celebratory symbol of the union of the divine and the human'.⁴¹ It is in this moment that the union of earthly and divine spirits, the climax of what Yeats called 'the drama of the soul', takes the vivid form of lovers embracing.

However, in the 'deathless love' scene in Rossetti's *The Blessed Damozel*, the protagonists cannot attain such a moment. While lovers 'newly met' each other around the solitary spirit damsel,⁴² her man remained on earth, longing for her, saying:

Surely she leaned o'ver me – her hair
Fell all about my face.⁴³

And so, he wonders:

...But shall God lift
To that endless unity
The soul whose likeness with thy soul
Was but its love for thee?⁴⁴

based on *History and Description of the Decorations by Mrs Traquair in the Mortuary of the Royal Hospital for Sick Children, Edinburgh*, which was supplied to her in 1984, by the Royal Edinburgh Hospital for Sick Children, now part of Lothian Health Board. See *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴² Stanza 7, in *R*, 3.

⁴³ Stanza 4, in *R*, 2.

⁴⁴ Stanza 17, in *R*, 5.

Figure 3-1.

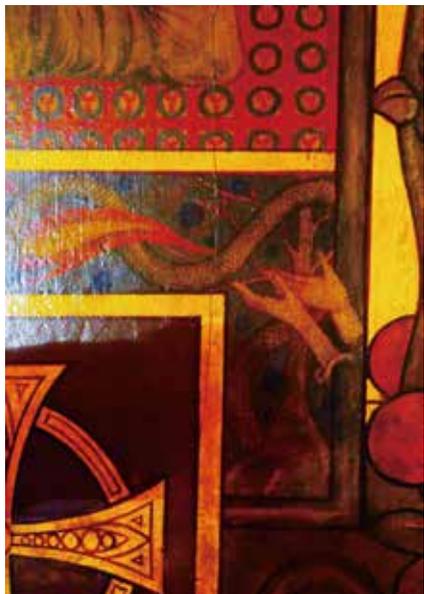


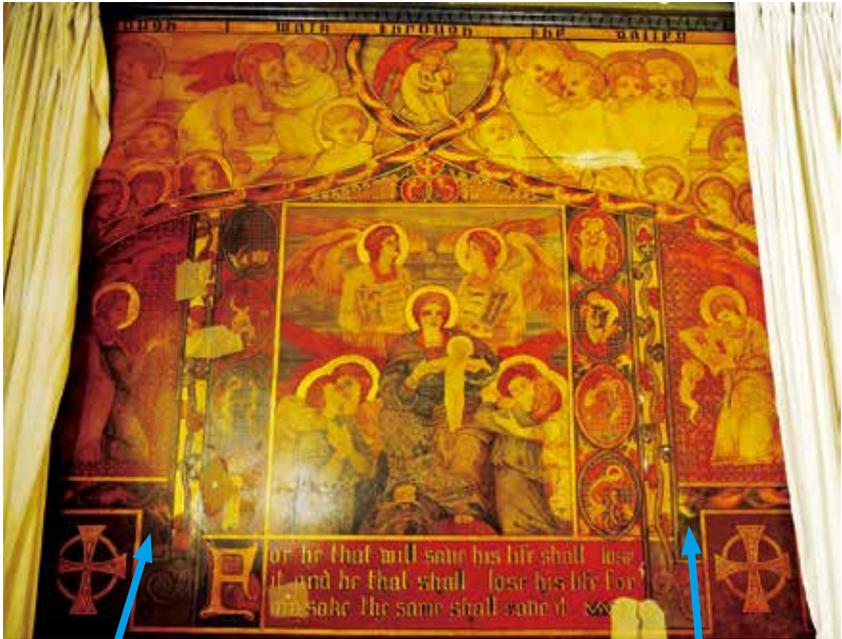
Figure 3-2.



Figure 3-3.



Figure 3-4.



(Figure 3-1)

(Figure 3-3)

Figures 3-1 to 4:
The North Wall of The Mortuary Chapel, The Royal Hospital for Sick Children, Edinburgh.

Such acute feelings of separation surely match closely those of the bereaved parents praying in the Mortuary Chapel of the Children's Hospital. Moreover, this longed-for moment of spiritual reunion is to be identified with Rossetti's 'Love's Hour', as will be discussed in the next section.

5 'Love's Hour' in Yeats's Poetry

The term 'Love's Hour' is taken from Rossetti's 'The Stream's Secret' (1870),⁴⁵ which Yeats had called 'dream poetry'.⁴⁶ As the narrator considers 'Love's Hour', the atmosphere evoked is one laden with mystic and sensuous qualities:

Beneath her sheltering hair,
 In the warm silence near her breast,
 Our kisses and our sobs shall sink to rest;
 As in some still trance made aware
 That day and night have wrought to fulness there
 And Love has built our nest.⁴⁷

...

Love's Hour - till she and I shall meet
 With bodiless and unapparent feet...⁴⁸

Thus the poem's narrator awaits 'Love's Hour', which stands for the rapture of the union with his beloved, to be consummated in their 'nest'. However, the union he anticipates is not merely a physical, but also a spiritual one. Their meeting 'with bodiless and unapparent feet' connotes what followers of Swedenborgian mysticism anticipated as the spiritual reunion, attainable only after death.

It appears that, for Yeats, what was most appealing about Rossetti's

⁴⁵ *R*, 166.

⁴⁶ *Au*, 434.

⁴⁷ Stanza 14, in *R*, 162.

⁴⁸ Stanza 28, in *R*, 166.

poetry was the longing for the fruition of love, both physical and spiritual. Such longing is characteristic of Yeats's own love poetry, notably the works collected in *The Rose* (1892), and *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899), in which the ecstatic moments of sexual love are emphasised by sensuous physical detail: the women in these poems have heavy-lidded eyes, abundant hair and pearl-pale skin, and thus resemble Rossetti's heroines, especially those in works from the 1870s.⁴⁹ For example, in 'He Bids His Beloved Be at Peace' (1896), we read,

Beloved, let your eyes half close, and your heart beat
Over my heart, and your hair fall over my breast,
Drowning love's lonely hour in deep twilight of rest.⁵⁰

Indeed, the 'Love's Hour' of Rossetti's 'Stream's Secret' seems to encapsulate the very essence of erotic romance. As Bickley remarks in discussing Rossetti's influence upon Yeats,⁵¹ the poet's image of 'drowning' or rapturously resting in 'love's lonely hour' owes much to the model of Rossetti's lovers' in a 'trance' of lovemaking in their 'nest'.⁵² Furthermore, phrases such as 'heart beat over my heart' and 'hair falls over my breast', bear a close resemblance to Rossetti's 'sheltering hair', and 'warm silence near her breast'.⁵³ Similarly, in the poem 'He Reproves the Curlew' (1896), Yeats describes a woman with 'Passion-dimmed eyes and long heavy hair

⁴⁹ Bricckley, 75.

⁵⁰ Peter Alt and Russell K. Alspach, eds., *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats* (New York: Macmillan, 1957), 154. Hereafter cited as *VP*.

⁵¹ Bickley, *op.cit.*, 81–82.

⁵² Stanza 14, in *R*, 162.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 162.

/ that was shaken out over my breast',⁵⁴ a clear image of an erotic moment with an adored woman.

All such poems anticipate sad endings, a fact that might be related to Yeats's own romantic history, notably his affair with Olivia Shakespear and his unrequited love for Maud Gonne.⁵⁵ The poet seems to say that the physical union with his love would not be attained, at least in his present life. As if to confirm such a fate, in another one of Yeats's poems 'He Hears the Cry of the Sedge' (1899), the wind cries:

*Until the axle break
That keeps the stars in their round,
And hands hurl in the deep
The banners of East and West,
And the girdle of light is unbound,
Your breast will not lie by the breast
Of your beloved in sleep.*⁵⁶

That is, unless the order of real world falls apart and his life comes to an end, the lover can never be united with his beloved.

⁵⁴ *VP*, 155.

⁵⁵ Olivia Shakespear (1863–1938) was a British writer. She met Yeats in the 1890s, and their friendship led to a physically intimate relationship in 1896. Maud Gonne (1866–1953) was Anglo-Irish actress, suffragette, and Irish republican activist. Yeats met Gonne in 1889, and loved her for decades afterwards. Although Gonne never accepted Yeats's proposals, their friendship remained on the deep understanding of each other. They regarded their relationship to be 'a mystical marriage' related to their occultism studies.

⁵⁶ *VP*, 165.

6 Inspired by *The House of Life*

In contemplating Yeats's fascination with 'Love's Hour', Bickley notes that the concepts and imagery discussed above as 'familiar Rossettian notion' are emphasised in Rossetti's sonnet collection *The House of Life*.⁵⁷ Furthermore, these poems can be seen as a bridge between the aesthetic senses of Yeats and Traquair. The essence of *The House of Life* is to be found in the manifold dimensions of love both physical and spiritual, with intense emotion, such as affection, joy in love, fear of separation, and pain of loss. The strong desire for lovers' union is conveyed by the passages such as 'Thine eyes gray-lit in shadowing hair above, Seals with thy mouth his immortality',⁵⁸ and 'Sweet dimness of her loosened hair's downfall about thy face'.⁵⁹ Surely these phrases are akin to the aspiration in Yeats's love poems.

For Traquair, as Cumming remarks, *The House of Life* was the work to which she 'turned most frequently for inspiration'.⁶⁰ From 1898 to 1902, Traquair was occupied in illustrating its first edition. She responded to the poetic texts with brilliant images. For example, for Sonnet VI, 'Supreme Surrender', she portrayed a melancholic-eyed Rossetti embracing a lover (**Figure 4**). The way the woman's long hair flows across Rossetti's chest reflects the sonnet's phrase 'Across my breast the abandoned hair doth flow'.⁶¹ As another instance, for Sonnet II, 'Love's Redemption', which refers directly to 'Love's Hour', Traquair's illustration is a romantic vision of lovemaking (**Figure 5**). The text begins, 'O thou who at Love's Hour

⁵⁷ Bickley, 81.

⁵⁸ Sonnet VIII 'Love's Lovers' in *R*, 126.

⁵⁹ Sonnet XXI 'Love-Sweetness' in *R*, 139.

⁶⁰ Cumming, *Phoebe Anna Traquair*, 46, 81.

⁶¹ *R*, 125.

Figure 4. Sonnet VI ‘Supreme Surrender’ from *The House of Life* by D.G. Rossetti. Illuminated manuscript by Phoebe Anna Traquair (National Library of Scotland).



Figure 5. Sonnet II ‘Love’s Redemption’ from *The House of Life* by D.G. Rossetti. Illuminated manuscript by Phoebe Anna Traquair (National Library of Scotland).



Figure 6. *Love's Testament* (1898), oil canvas by Phoebe Anna Traquair.



Collection of Lord Lloyd Webber,

reproduced in Elizabeth Cumming, *Phoebe Anna Traquair 1852–1936* (National Galleries of Scotland in association with National Museums Scotland, 2005. rpt. 2011), p. 47.

ecstatically / Upon my heart does ever more present'.⁶² Considering the sonnet's last line, 'thine eyes /draw up my prisoned spirit to thy soul',⁶³ this loving scene seems also to be representing the union of the earthly and the spiritual, which Yeats had described as 'the drama of the soul'.

In 1898, the same year she created *The House of Life* illumination, Traquair reworked this image of lovers into an easel painting in oil (Figure 6). Measuring 35 by 53 cm, the painting was titled 'Love's

⁶² R, 121. Rossetti's *The House of Life* was first published in 1870, with 'Love's Redemption' included as 'Sonnet II'. In the revised edition of 1881, the poem appeared as 'Sonnet III', under the title 'Love's Testament'.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 121.

Testament', the title by which 'Love's Redemption' was known in the revised edition of the collection published in 1881. In both illumination and painting, Traquair depicted a woman with heavy-lidded half-closed eyes, reaching her bare arms to caress her lover over a translucent arc of rainbow. Her long, abundant hair falls over his hollow face. It is especially interesting that, while corresponding to Rossetti's visionary 'Love's Hour', these images equally capture exactly scenes from Yeats's love poetry. Therefore it is possible to regard these works as Traquair's visualisation of Yeats's fascination with 'Love's Hour'.

7 Conclusion

In examining Yeats's literary works in the context of the Arts and Crafts movement, it is clear that Rossetti's poetry exerted a strong influence that cannot be ignored. Yeats himself was aware of it, acknowledging that 'Rossetti was a subconscious influence, and perhaps the most powerful of all'.⁶⁴ The imagination Yeats fostered under the aesthetic and sometimes erotic atmosphere of Rossettian arts motivated his literary creativity to acquire intense vividness, while Traquair turned such an imagination into a material reality through her art. In other words, Rossetti provided both Yeats and Traquair with significant inspiration, directing them to the aesthetically-corresponding dimension in literature and art, respectively. Yeats's description of Traquair as 'delightful, a saint and a little singing bird',⁶⁵ shows his refined understanding of the craftswoman who independently and continuously pursued the joy of artistic creation.

⁶⁴ *Au*, 302.

⁶⁵ *Seventy Years*, 435.

This essay is a revised and expanded version of a paper presented at the Annual Conference 'Yeats and Eros / Yeats and Paris' of the International Yeats Society (Université Paris 3 Sorbonne Nouvelle, 12th – 14th December 2019).

References

Primary Sources

- Armour, Margaret. 'Mural Decoration in Scotland, Part I'. *The Studio* vol.10 (1897): 100–106.
- Morris, A.F. 'A Versatile Art Worker: Mrs. Traquair'. *The Studio* vol.34 (1905): 339–43.
- Morris, William. *The Collected Works of William Morris*, vol. XXII. New York: Russell & Russell, 1966.
- Rossetti, William Michael, ed. *The Complete Poetical Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*. Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1905.
- The Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland. *Journal and Proceedings of the Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland* (1896).
- Yeats, William Butler. *Autobiographies*. London: Macmillan, 1980.
- , *Essays and Introductions*. London: Macmillan, 1961.
- , *Explorations*. London: Macmillan, 1962.

Manuscripts

National Library of Scotland, MS 8123.

Secondary Sources

- Alt, Peter and Alspach, Russell K. eds. *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats*. New York: Macmillan, 1957.
- Bickley, Pamela. 'How They Met Themselves': Rossetti and Yeats in the 1890s'. In Warwick Gould, ed., *Yeats Annual*. vol. 14. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001: 50–103.
- Bowe, Nicola G. 'The Irish Arts and Crafts Movement (1886–1925)'. *GPA Irish Arts Review Yearbook* (1990–1991): 172–85.
- Bowe, Nicola G. and Cumming, Elizabeth, eds. *The Arts and Crafts Movements in Dublin and Edinburgh 1885–1925*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1998.
- Cumming, Elizabeth. *Hand, Heart and Soul: The Arts and Crafts Movement in Scotland*. Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2006.
- , 'Imagination, Magic and Romance: Arts and Crafts Mural Decoration in Edinburgh'. In P. Burman, ed., *Architecture 1900*, 240–249. Donhead St Mary, Dorset: Donhead Publishing, 1998.

- , 'Patterns of Life: the Art and Design of Phoebe Anna Traquair and Mary Seton Watts'. In B. Elliott and J. Helland, eds., *Women Artists and the Decorative Arts 1880-1935: The Gender of Ornament*, 15-34. London: Ashgate, 2002.
- , 'Phoebe Anna Traquair: Angels and Changing Concepts of the supernatural in fin-de-siècle Scotland'. In P. Jupp and S. Buckham, eds., *Death in Modern Scotland, 1855-1955: beliefs, attitudes and practices*, 11-30. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2016.
- , *Phoebe Anna Traquair 1852-1936*. Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland in association with National Museums Scotland, 2005. rpt. 2011.
- , 'Pure magic: the power of tradition in Scottish Arts and Crafts'. In S. Alfoldy, ed., *NeoCraft: Modernity and the Crafts*, 173-190. Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2007.
- Fahy, Catherine. *W.B. Yeats and his Circle*. Dublin: The National Library of Ireland, 1989.
- Ferguson, Megan C. *Patrick Geddes and the Celtic Renaissance of the 1890s*. Ph.D. Dissertation to the University of Dundee, 2011.
- Foster, Roy. *W. B. Yeats: A Life*. 2 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997-2003.
- Frayne, John P., ed. *Uncollected Prose by W. B. Yeats*, vol. 1. London: Macmillan, 1970.
- Frayne, John P. and Marchaterre, Madeleine, eds. *Early Articles and Essays*. New York: Scribner, 2004. vol. 9 of *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*. 14 vols.
- Larmour, Paul. *The Arts & Crafts Movement in Ireland*. Belfast: Friar's Bush Press, 1992.
- Loizeaux, Elizabeth Bergmann. *Yeats and the Visual Arts*. London: Rutgers University Press, 1986.
- Murphy, William M. *Family Secrets: William Butler Yeats and His Relatives*. Syracuse University Press, 1995.
- Smythe, Colin, ed. *Seventy Years: Being the Autobiography of Lady Gregory*. Buckinghamshire: Gerrad Cross, 1974.
- Stein, Richard L. *The Ritual of Interpretation: the fine arts as literature in Ruskin, Rossetti and Pater*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975.
- Takahashi, Yuki. *W.B. Yeats in the Irish Arts and Crafts Movement*. Ph.D. Dissertation to Aoyama Gakuin University, 2016.