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# YEATS 2015 AND THE CROWDSOURCED AUDIO ARCHIVE: PEDAGOGICAL POSSIBILITIES FOR POETRY

## Ragini Mohite

or W. B. Yeats's 150th birth anniversary, the *Yeats 2015* initiative sponsored ◀ a multitude of celebratory events in Ireland and internationally; these included a traveling exhibition, lectures, musical performances and recitations, academic conferences, new translations, and more.1 Among these was a project called Your Yeats that gathered crowdsourced audio recordings of Yeats's poems read by global audiences not all of whom were trained performers or poets. These recordings were collated on SoundCloud using #YourYeats and compiled into playlists by the Yeats 2015 account.2 Formerly linked to the Yeats 2015 website, the files themselves were originally uploaded to SoundCloud where they are still available.3 Stressing Yeats's commitment to poetry composed "for the ear" as well as his experiments with reading for "the wireless," the project's SoundCloud page positions contemporary readers as the latest beneficiaries of technological developments in audio recording, digital transmission, and storage. 4 Such readers include not only those who originally contributed to the playlist, but also current and future listeners. As a form of digital commemoration, the project, I argue, productively intervenes in the relationship of contemporary audiences to Yeats's writings, thereby affording us a useful model for poetic pedagogy in which performance and its preservation become sites where theoretical and formal engagements with poetry can be creatively explored. I also consider the desirability of a new, ongoing archive of crowdsourced performances of Yeats's works, one that is based on Your Yeats but makes room for multiple iterations of a greater number of poems and for critical dialogue between students worldwide. Such a project would allow international students of Yeats's poetry to listen to tracks that others add, contribute to the archive, and make their own performative and textual choices as active participants in this dialogue.

First, a brief description of the archive. As of April 2022, the Yeats 2015 account on SoundCloud held 116 tracks (or readings).<sup>5</sup> It has curated three playlists. The first, Your Yeats 2015, contains twenty-six tracks, all performed by public figures (actors, musicians, poets, scholars); the second is a compilation of thirteen performances of "The Lake Isle of Innisfree." This poem was also the subject of worldwide recitations in December 2015, according to the *Activities* 

by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Support of Yeats 2015 report, perhaps explaining the need to compile these readings in a curated playlist.<sup>6</sup> Most pertinent to this essay is the third playlist: Your Yeats. This is the largest of the three and contains 151 tracks, with a total listening time of 1:24:44.<sup>7</sup>

Your Yeats contains performances by public figures as in the first playlist. But, crucially, this playlist also includes contributions from private readers as well as sixteen additions by Lagan Press, a Derry publisher committed to "forms of literary expression which have little opportunity to be heard in the market-place." In this playlist, what is essentially a crowdsourced archive is partly aligned with cultural institutions such as Lagan Press, governmental partners affiliated with the larger *Yeats 2015* project, and the various embassies and cultural institutions across the globe that hosted live audience readings. The playlist, then, bears the markers of an institutionally-supported project while still incorporating elements that mark it as extrainstitutional.

The first track on the playlist, and its most frequently played, is Seamus Heaney's previously recorded rendition of "What Then?" (which has been played 2,587 times).9 This is followed by Dan Mulhall's reading of "The Wild Swans at Coole" (1,124 plays), and Micheal Ó Muircheartaigh's reading of "Fiddler of Dooney" (1,048 plays). These tracks are not sequenced on the playlist based on popularity alone, although earlier tracks do generally receive more attention. Most of the sequence does not seem intentionally curated; instead, it appears to have expanded organically as readers uploaded recordings. Among its 151 tracks, we find eighty "texts," a majority of which are Yeats's poems. Of the others, one is a complete dramatized reading of *Purgatory* by Brian Munn that clocks in at 13:06 minutes and brings the tradition of radio plays into the digital age. Adrian Paterson also looks to Yeats's drama, providing a reading of "At the Grey Round of the Hill" from *The Dreaming of the Bones*. These are the two significant gestures toward Yeats's drama in this playlist. Another track is a discussion of the Gonne family titled "Imogen Stewart On Maud Gonne" originally heard, according to the track description, at the "Muse of Yeats' Festival in Rossnaree Co Meath on Saturday October 10th 2015," where the sculptor and daughterin-law of Iseult Gonne spoke. 10 Works from Yeats's middle and later years (1914 onward and including the poems from Responsibilities) appear more often and contribute fifty-two texts, with twenty-seven texts from the pre-1914 period. 11 However, the three most frequently recorded tracks (as opposed to the most frequently played) are all from the pre-1914 period. "The Song of Wandering Aengus," unsurprisingly, appears twelve times (including one musical number by the Carlow Choir titled "Brightening Air" and two files of the same recording by Joan Burton). The second and third most frequently recorded tracks are "He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven" and "The Lake Isle of Innisfree." which both appear a total of nine times. I will return to some of these poems later.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHIC AND CONTEXTUAL CODES

From the 1990s onward, George Bornstein strongly encouraged critics and readers to pay attention to the bibliographic and contextual codes of Yeats's poetry (as well as its linguistic codes). He urged critics and readers to "imagine text more as process than as product, and to search for forms of display that represent a dynamic development rather than a static outcome."12 Bornstein also suggested that the "contextual codes" of certain volumes were imbued with critique, and that the full deployment of such codes "leads away from fixity, stability, and hierarchy, and towards flux, instability, and something short of anarchy but still moving in the direction of radical textual egalitarianism" indicating that this thaws the earlier "freezing" by publishers in earlier copyrighted editions.<sup>13</sup> Crowdsourced digital performances preserve and reshape Yeats's linguistic codes while also reconfiguring their bibliographical and contextual codes, and they certainly bolster our sense of "text as process." A person reading a poem for a crowdsourced archive is actively manipulating recording technology to literally manufacture his or her own text, and though the listener may not be touching a physical reel, cassette, or CD, they have the ability to impact the speed of play, play recordings from selected midpoints, or switch randomly or decisively between tracks. Jussi Parikka argues that such tactile "play" with media is an important part of didactics despite "technical media often work[ing] in subphenomenal ways—in other words, their principles of operation are not directly open to observation by the human eye—such a manner of tinkering with media-technological effects forms a circuit with the theoretical work."14 In this case, theoretical work may include the work of literary criticism, performance, or even engagement with editorial theory. Such acts of contextual reconfiguration are possible when "playing" with this archive. The first of such acts is the creation of the two smaller playlists that accompany the main archive playlist on the Yeats 2015 account, particularly the playlist that compiles all readings of "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" into one and better enables a comparative listening experience of the famous poem. The more comprehensive playlist—Your Yeats—creates multiple avenues in which such textual egalitarianism may be fostered, and audiences retain the agency to curate their own listening sequence of poems as demonstrated by both the smaller playlists. While the Your Yeats playlist itself is now fixed, a student even today may create their own playlist by choosing from texts included in Your Yeats, creating playlists dedicated to a single poem, by thematic grouping, and even by including these recordings alongside tracks that are not on the playlist but are hosted by SoundCloud. A simple search using #wbyeats shows 412 tracks on this website, which despite some overlap, also includes readings not included in Yeats 2015, critical

discussions, and even public lectures. An open-ended archive would radically expand this playing field.

Each listener, for instance, would be able to curate a new playlist of their own by adding tracks from different sources and in different sequences. Such play and curation are a culmination of extended active listening, which, as I remind students encountering a poetry class for the first time, goes handin-hand with close reading and is inextricably tied to critical discourse and performative practices. My classes are comprised of Indian students who are accustomed to studying in the English language but have often not encountered poetry's formal dimensions. The value of such active listening was evident in my classroom when, upon hearing Yeats's 1936 BBC recording of "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" when they read the poem, students opined that the word "purple" seemed a misfit in the poem to their ears. This resulted in a discussion of Yeats's own accompanying commentary on the poem's vocabulary. To Indian students completely alien to Irish landscapes and culture, new to poetry and to Yeats, and tentative in their approach to what seems an intimidating form of literature, the results of such close, attentive listening provide an increased level of confidence and a greater willingness to critically "play" with their interpretation of the poem's codes. An open-ended archive would allow students to hear Yeats's own critical commentary and reading of the poem, examine how other global readers engage with it, and even contribute their own performances. It would extend the benefits of close reading and active listening into an active form of creative and pedagogically useful play.

Matthew Rubery stresses the value of listening to recorded poems for students struggling "to comprehend literature from a distant era. The voicing of [such] texts [makes] the experience less alien and . . . suggest[s] insights" that otherwise might be missed. 15 To scholars, Yeats's era may not seem distant, but for many listeners, certainly for my students in India, his work is culturally distant in many ways. Voicing such texts and listening to them being read by different voices actualizes the text's aural fluidity and dynamism and reveals just how much performance can unlock the possibilities latent in the "original" printed text. Herein lies the pedagogical value of poetry recorded by lay readers, public figures, fans, and critics in addition to poets and trained performers, all residing within the same digital space. The amateur volunteer effort that contributes to the audiobook library LibriVox, Rubery comments, is both "an asset as well as a liability since narrators range from professionally trained voice actors to non-native speakers struggling to master the English accent."16 The ethos of LibriVox is founded on the idea that texts gain something powerful when "narrated by real people." <sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, in the current Your Yeats playlist, we do not find nonnative speakers attempting to master an English accent through the medium of poetry, but rather nonnative speakers speaking confidently in their own voices and, in doing so, radically transforming the work of an author who himself did not speak with a "standard" accent. The emphasis is less on English language acquisition than on a broad approach to and application of literary analysis. Rather than proving a liability, such voices, coming together, open up new interpretative and methodological avenues to scholars of poetry via the performance-text.

I agree with Rob Doggett that "helping people attend to the literariness of a poem—the formal density of language—is, [...] still best achieved . . . through guided practice" and emphasis on "poetry as a collaborative or interactive aesthetic experience that depends upon [students'] own close reading." The Yeats playlist on SoundCloud facilitates these goals, though (as I will argue) the addition of a new and open-ended crowdsourced Yeats archive would add important new dimensions. Listeners who interact with such archives encounter the transformative process a poem goes through when articulated and performed by different, diverse voices, who each add their own rhythms and intonation and accent; such archives may further provide scholars with important information about changing trends in the wider reception of key poems, reading habits, and pedagogical exercises.

## "READING" THE TEXT

The increasing use of electronic media, Bornstein has suggested, will change our understanding of modernist literary works that are especially "protean, existing in multiple and equally authorized forms." 19 A writer like Yeats, he acknowledges, lends himself well to issues of "versionality" through each instance of revision. <sup>20</sup> Doggett picks up on these issues in the classroom via technological developments to drive home Marjorie Perloff's reminder about the constructed nature of a poem.<sup>21</sup> He argues further that "the digital medium effectively collapses the distinction between aesthetic and pragmatic discursive modes," and "encourages us to understand poems not as art but as vehicles for information transmission."22 Given the risk this poses to the students' reading of "poetry as poetry" (or art), it also presents critical opportunities through this information transmission, especially when that information pertains to the poem-text and the performance-text and their changing relationship in a globalized technological world.<sup>23</sup> When acts of reading are conducted not just by professional poets or scholars, but by amateur readers or "fans," such performances often contain imaginative applications, extensions, and even critiques of speculative thought.

The choices the audience-performers are making in the Your Yeats playlist are deeply idiosyncratic, based on personal connections and tastes, critical assessments, ease of access to the material, and even the convenience

determined by the length and language of the text at times. In the classroom, the syllabi and anthologies used by teachers place seemingly disparate poems and poets adjacently. While it is worth considering how advanced students can learn to read not just single texts but whole collections, we must first think about how novice students may approach poetic reading. The students I encounter in introductory poetry classes are enthusiastic but mostly untrained in the process of scansion.<sup>24</sup> Despite this—or rather because of it—I find it useful to incorporate classes on rhythm, rhyme, and meter into introductory courses, thus unsettling the focus established by school curricula on reading poetry for content or theme, or as a variation on narrative prose. Students in my classes embrace this aural approach but there seems to be a worry among them about the "correctness" of their methods and results in identifying meter. In large part, this is because they bring with them an expectation that poetry should be encountered through the mediation of some "standardized" recitation. But, at least in my classroom, students speak in accents from across India that make consensus regarding meter impossible. This is where online tools can become useful classroom resources, not just for the teaching of Yeats's poetry specifically, but for the teaching of poetic form at large. For example, the online project For Better for Verse, an interactive learning website for poetic form created by the University of Virginia's Department of English provides several metered poems by various authors, including Yeats, and allows users to map their feet, meter, and stresses.<sup>25</sup> But For Better for Verse demands correct answers.

By contrast, a crowdsourced recorded collection such as the Your Yeats playlist provides multiple renditions of poems and can be usefully employed by instructors to enable a greater engagement with the imprecise art of prosody. For instance, with close reading and scansion, it becomes clear that the two commas in line 6 of "He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven" mark the shift between feet and force a slowing down of the rhythm to emphasize the stresses further. Listening to the various renditions of the poem in the Your Yeats playlist, it is striking how readers pick up on the deliberate rhythm of these lines and apply it to other parts of the poem where the stresses stand out to them. Scansion and performance can then help inform each other, with students learning to engage with performative choices by scanning poetry, and the performances helping to refine their understanding of poetic rhythms. Like several of Yeats's early poems, "He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven" is a relatively easy starter poem for the study of scansion and one that usefully generates conversations about the absoluteness of the practice. Hannan Sullivan has noted Yeats's own lack of prosodic expertise and argues that his poems reflect greater metrical and rhythmic control as he grows more practiced.<sup>26</sup> This is a developmental trajectory to which students of poetry can relate. After reading "He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven" and attempting to scan it, one student commented

that the word "poor" seems to have less to do with "his economic situation" than what the speaker could "give" the lover.<sup>27</sup> This student was attempting to associate the idea of impoverishment with the repetitions as end-rhymes and what they found to be irregular meter; to them, the poem became a creative token for the speaker to hand over to the subject, albeit a token with certain formal deficits. This kind of engagement—fostered by active listening to multiple, variant recordings—reveals metrical play to be an imperfect, lively art rather than a hidebound set of rules. Listening to multiple recitations of the poem would have enabled the student to hear patterns that they struggled to identify on the page. Whereas a single reading—even if it was heard multiple times—would only demonstrate one reader's performative choices, the wider practice of listening to a poem read by different voices would enable novice students, unused to engaging with poetry on the syllabic level, to juxtapose sound with poem-text and map metrical patterns on the page.

In my classroom, with its diverse range of accents from across India, there are often discussions about how many syllables a word contains and whether the spoken word and written word may be scanned the same way given its differing pronunciations. This is particularly challenging when poems incorporate culturally idiomatic words or phrases. "Aedh," "Cuchulain," "Aengus," and so on pose a particular challenge for Indian students who attempt to read these words phonetically, sometimes even transcribing the word in the Devanagari script based on the instructor's pronunciation. Scanning the same poems according to the different accentual patterns of readers from around the globe, for instance, can demonstrate to the students a greater dynamism to prosody than a strictly syllabic pattern of scansion which demands a single "correct" response. For my students who begin their journeys with scansion using Shakespeare or Blake, but who, by the end of the course, are asked to either translate or compose original poems while playing with different aspects of form, such engagement with sounds, forms, and variations is a meaningful stepping stone to a sophisticated understanding of poetic form.

Among the Your Yeats playlist's most interesting and useful recordings—from a pedagogical perspective—are readings of "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" and "To a Squirrel at Kyle-na-No" by children from Ardfert Central National School, Kerry, and a recitation of "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death" by another group from Newport National School, Mayo. In each case, a full classroom of students performs the poems together in a typically sing-song manner with rhythms and pace varying between poems. With only small metrical variations, each of these poems lends themselves well to such recitation and listening to them offers an easy and entertaining way for introductory poetry students to grasp their rhythms. While the Your Yeats playlist includes no tracks that contain Yeats's own recitations of his poems, his readings of "The Lake Isle

of Innisfree" are widely available elsewhere, including once on the playlist dedicated to the poem. Of the nine recitations of "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" on the Your Yeats playlist, one musical rendition ends at the end of line 6. Of the remaining eight, four employ the rhythm on the words "deep heart's core" (VP 117, l. 12) to fade the poem out acoustically, clearly influenced by Yeats's own reading.<sup>28</sup> The classroom recitation from the Kerry schoolchildren is one example of performance as pedagogy. An open-ended archive would be able to situate such a performance alongside recitations from students across the globe, including India, thereby enabling a comparative listening experience and fruitful critical discussion at the early stages of poetic study. Five recordings by adults also recognize and employ the natural pauses in the same places in lines 6 and 10—caesurae that separate the inconsistent meter in the first half of both those lines with the consistent iambic feet of the second half but are not mapped out on the published text. These rhythms and patterns must have been made evident to the students reading and recording the poem together; the pedagogical value of practices of recitation, recording, and listening back is clear here.

There have long been critical discussions of the value of poetry memorization in the classroom. While the audio-only format of the Your Yeats playlist leaves us unable to determine if these poems were memorized, it is evident that the emphasis on rhythm, which enables easier memorization, is utilized as a mode of reading by these students. Mike Chasar notes that memorized poetry in a classroom setting becomes a "crucial intersection of oral and print economies," incorporating the values of orality "bodily carriage, gesture, intonation, and elocution" while maintaining "fidelity to the original, printed text"; this process, he recalls, can help "to segue children from the lived, relational values associated with orality and into the abstract and impersonal knowledge systems facilitated by print."29 Yet Chasar notes that due to the habits of rhythmic classroom memorization, values of orality have also come to be associated with "childhood, emotion, occasional verse, amateurism, popular or mass culture, lack of aesthetic sophistication, and knowing 'by heart.'30 The readers of Yeats we encounter in the Your Yeats playlist, then, perform both in the classroom and outside it, engaging in what Doggett calls "guided practice" even outside of a traditionally educational infrastructure. Certainly, there are some readers who, having encountered these poems first in print, as students, tone down their rhythms and deliver performances that embody both the values of orality and of print: "notions of professional authorship, literariness, complexity, and impersonal judgment on the part of their editors and readers."31 The diverse mix of readings by students and adults in the Your Yeats playlist challenges associations of amateurism with aesthetic unsophistication and suggests, at times, the reverse. With the increased use of digital media in academia, practices

of memorization, and reading aloud have regained some of their popularity in contemporary classrooms and now seem to indicate a breaking down of print-poetry's hegemony, allowing teachers to incorporate performance poetry into their teaching methods and their syllabi.<sup>32</sup>

### POETRY AND PERFORMANCE

One such instance of performance is that of students reading poetry aloud to each other. Early undergraduate students of poetry often note in my classes the marked difference in the experience of reading a poem, or even reading it out loud to oneself versus having it read to them. Whereas some students become more attentive to the details of whatever narrative structure the poem holds, others become more attentive to its rhythms, poetic devices, and dramatic qualities. In each case, the ear makes note of poetic components that the eye is not inclined to or practiced enough to identify. And acts of reading aloud in my classes reveal some new aspect of a poem to students each time a different reader steps up to perform it. This is the potential held within the ongoing crowdsourced archive I envision adding to what Your Yeats makes available, one which can encourage both active listening and deeply considered performance in voices that are global and significantly more diverse than a single classroom in India, despite its internal heterogeneity.

An ongoing project of crowdsourced Yeats recordings would build an ever-increasing archive of multiple performance iterations in a varied range of voices, dialects, accents, and even languages, as I will discuss. It could contain playlists curated by time period, collection, theme, and even playlists dedicated to specific poems. The use of tags could enable listeners to juggle between playlists and curate their own engagement within this archive. Importantly, a developed search functionality and index would be a useful addition in enabling users to play with its features and could potentially be accompanied by hyperlinks to the poem-texts. Moreover, the project would necessarily be open access given the impetus to bring in as diverse a group of contributors and listeners as possible.

The participatory freedom granted to contributors to this proposed archive would not be without precedent or entirely at odds with Yeats's own values as an artist. Indeed, such flexible and dialogic engagement has been fostered by periodicals, radio, and new media at least since the early years of the twentieth century as a means of building communities united by cultural interests who had an affective relationship to literary texts. Alexandra Edwards notes that while such engagement may not have been new practice, the specific language of this relationship and of "practices (of collection, mastery, and textual response) was new then," changing the way in which media addressed such

readers. She continues that "fans and media worked together (and sometimes at cross-purposes) to construct reading as both interactive and communal—and this working together [...] was built into the very structure of the periodical press and the other forms of integrated media on the rise in the early twentieth century."<sup>33</sup> As a broadcaster, Yeats himself seems to invoke such interactions when he invites listeners to form a community around the hypothetical pub and parlor or to critique prosaic recitations of verse. <sup>34</sup> Given that he issued this invitation in a 1936 broadcast, Yeats must surely have known that many listeners would be amateurs who were nonetheless accustomed to poetry's rhythms, that is, fans who could make the basic distinction between a reading that was made prosaic for the benefit of a novice and one that adhered to the rhythm of poetry. In issuing this invitation to respond to poetry readings, Yeats reminds listeners and students to be attentive to poetic rhythms, to bring their intuitive affinity for rhythm to the forefront of critical engagement.

Today's rogue contributors— ones who do not contribute under the masthead of any affiliate institution or copyright owning medium—may also perform prosaic recitations, and while Yeats may have disapproved, this tendency we observe in Your Yeats seems to support the argument that "any attempt to recapture oral tradition requires concessions to modernity."35 A collection such as Your Yeats may not, then, sit comfortably within Yeats's ideas of performance and audience engagement, but it illustrates the impossibility of anticipating the reach and capacity of the worldwide web in the early twentieth century, and the continued prevalence of "variants" including those that fly in the face of authorial intent. An ongoing crowdsourced archive would be an example of what Abigail de Kosnik identifies as "rogue archives": spaces that accommodate content that would not otherwise have been included in "traditional memory institution[s]," and characterized by "constant (24/7) availability; zero barriers to entry for all who can connect to the Internet; content that can be streamed or downloaded in full, with no required payment, and no regard for copyright restrictions."36 What makes archives rogue is the act of transforming them from exclusive sites into "information commons," and which "Derrida claims, can beget serious social and cultural transformations."37 Chasar recognizes that "ordinary readers of popular poetry [are] more self-aware, discerning, creative and socially engaged than literary critics and historians have typically assumed, even though those audiences' reading methods, habits, and characteristics don't necessarily or even frequently map neatly onto those recommended by poets, educators, experts, or other cultural curators."38 Chasar is speaking of popular poetry found in scrapbooks, advertisements, radio and so on in twentiethcentury America but his statement remains true of contemporary global audiences as does the fact that Yeats's poetry remains both "high"—in that it is part of the modernist canon, educational syllabi and so on—and popular, as is

evidenced by its repeated recitations, references in popular culture and public debate only a small number of which get preserved for posterity's sake.

Translations also represent important acts of pedagogical creativity. Four poems exist in the Your Yeats playlist both in English and in translation. The poet and translator Mitsuko Ohno's readings of "Lapis Lazuli" in English (3:01 minutes, 79 plays) and Japanese (3:34 minutes, 43 plays) are included. Huiyi Bao reads "Sailing to Byzantium" in English (2:02 minutes, 119 plays) and in Chinese translation (2:19 minutes, 103 plays). Historian Andres Eiriksson contributes three files containing readings of "The Lamentation of the Old Pensioner" to the playlist: an English reading (0:55 minutes and 70 plays), one in Icelandic (0:49 minutes and 87 plays) and, finally, both readings are combined in one track that is 1:44 minutes long (82 plays). The writer and translator Jyrki Vainonen reads on three tracks: an English-language reading of "He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven" (0:38 minutes, 51 plays), a Finnish translation of the poem as "Taivaiden Kankaat" (0:31, 81 plays), and a third file that contains both readings, first in English and then in Finnish (1:11 minutes, 61 plays). These two instances of combined files effectively tie together the source texts to their translation; in each file, the English source text precedes the translation with both coming to share a digital bibliographic code and metadata. And while we cannot ascertain how many listeners were repeating the experience (this author having contributed to at least one play on each track), a brief look at the number of plays received by translations indicates a significant interest in reading Yeats's poetry in translation, and an even more specific interest in a comparative listening experience across languages. This, then, enables students who are not native English speakers to engage with Yeats's poetry and for advanced students to consider how the poem's various codes are impacted through creative translation, thus increasing the global reach of Yeats's poetry. These translations are early indicators of what an open-ended archive could achieve with a section dedicated to translations in a greater number of languages and by demonstrating how several expert translators may engage with the same poem in distinct creative ways.

While these poems are all translated by experienced hands, one translation of "Aedh Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven" into Arabic is read by a Palestinian reader, Nawal Abusway, in a file timed at 0:26 minutes. However, the written translation is collectively done by "University of Qatar undergraduate students in English Literature from Qatar, Palestine, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Bangladesh." This small file holds within it not just a creative-critical undertaking, but also a collaboration between students and teacher that extends beyond the classroom, with the teacher adopting the mediumistic position to the work of poet and translators. The rhythm of the English-language poem, with its iambic feet interspersed with anapests, trochees, pyrrhic, and spondees,

enables spirited readings. However, the waveform visualizer available on SoundCloud attests to the uniform nature of the Arabic reading, with each line being apparent as one wave on the visualizer, timed evenly, and the lines with the strongest metrical inconsistencies (the fourth and the eighth) developing into the longest waves of sound. While such wave patterns are apparent in other readings as well, this track seems most consistent, attesting perhaps to the students' instinct of reading—and thereby translating—rhythmically. This track has been played 606 times, the most popular rendition of this poem after Adrian Raftery's English-language rendition. Pedagogically speaking, accommodating space for translations in an open-ended archive would provide an avenue for students to read and listen to Yeats's poetry in translation, and to carry out amateur translations. This would be a means for them to critically interrogate poems' language and sound and to experiment with and apply the formal knowledge developed in a classroom and invite feedback and discussion in a space dedicated to guided practice.

Here we see another pedagogical opportunity for students to extend their work in close reading and active listening, not just to performance but the creative steps that come before it. Even with English-language syllabi and students who demonstrate greater fluency in English rather than regional languages, discussions about translations in my introductory courses have generated useful ideas about the role of the translator, questions of fidelity to source texts, and to the craft of poetry ranging from the subtle dilution of Islamic allusions in Mirza Ghalib's poetry to the way translators play with metaphors in the different English translations of Rainer Maria Rilke's "Archaic Torso of Apollo." Making room for students of poetry to step into the shoes of a translator can enable a creative application of theoretical and critical ideas. It would fuel such engagement while also maintaining attention on the more subtle nuances of the source texts with regards to linguistic codes and the way bibliographical and contextual codes shift when the translation is carried out on the page, and then transposed into a live performance and then a digital recording.

Thinking of the archive as "artefact"— a product of human workmanship—which houses and impacts other material artefacts, Jason Camlot considers how its malleability can be fostered through ephemeral performances. 40 He writes that the transformative medium of the digital archive does not replace "empirical methods of writing history," but highlights "the significance of media contexts for the kinds of history we wish to pursue" and "allows us to discover aspects of our objects of inquiry that might not have been discoverable had they remained in a single media format." We may similarly say that acts of reading, translating, performing, recording, and listening—whether sequentially or individually—do not replace the silent reading of poetry but

can reveal the significance of attentive listening and creative practice to critical study in a way that helps reveal new aspects of the texts themselves. The last of these steps can also highlight the role that digital audio technology now plays within the history of poetry collection, storage, and performance. The digital medium confronts us with the destabilizing material element inherent in all cultural artifacts, and encourages an approach to research materials as "differential texts," a term introduced by Marjorie Perloff to mean "texts that exist in different material forms, with no single version being the definitive one," a term that Camlot "transmutes" to "support a claim for the concept of 'differential media' as one that demands our awareness of the transformative impact of media contexts as an object of interpretation migrates across, or exists multifariously within, different media platforms."

Thus, if an ongoing audio archive of performance were to be accompanied by the source texts by the poet and by poem-texts by various translators, it would inform this idea of differential media and potentially open up the study of Yeats's poetry to readers in languages that do not already possess authorized translations. The acts of performance and translation would then serve both as a pedagogical exercise and a resource, especially if accompanied by ways of engaging with texts such as interactive resources like scansion practice portals and discussion forums. Tom Chadwick and Pieter Vermeulen recognize that "while the digital context has specific relevance today, it also reflects the long-standing role of technology in determining the archive's structure—a role that anticipates Derrida's statement in *Archive Fever* that 'archivable meaning is also and in advance codetermined by the structure that archives."<sup>44</sup>

While still available on SoundCloud, the Your Yeats project has not continued adding tracks to the playlist since 2015, and remains true to the 2015 moment. The playlist is locked into the moment of commemoration. It has several other limitations as is true for an early model of collection and repository. Its one comprehensive playlist (and two supplementary ones) still contain a limited number of texts; there are several Yeats poems that do not feature here. While one may like, repost, share, or comment on individual tracks, there is no room for a larger discussion of the playlist at large. And finally, it is one part of a larger music and audio platform on which the uploaded files are stored. Being ongoing, a future crowdsourced archive would face no such limitations and could address some of these early limitations in useful ways, as I chart in the next section. Your Yeats would function as an early model for this archive and even become one component of the larger project. Both, together, would demonstrate to scholars from interdisciplinary backgrounds the value of crowdsourced readings, translations, and performance to critical discourses. Any supplementary educational tools like discussion forums and interactive content would enable wider discussions between students across

global classrooms, demonstrate the porosity of analogue and digital archives, and provide us with ever-increasing data (and metadata) regarding changes in reading, listening, and performance practices of Yeats's poetry across the globe.

## COLLABORATION, TASTE, AND RECEPTION

Even in this early model, the recordings on SoundCloud welcome new and returning audiences into Yeats's oeuvre in a more democratized way than lectures held at universities or exhibitions and live readings held within the walls of cultural institutions, often in metropolitan centers as the DFA Report records. While Yeats's revisions pose a challenge to identifying definitive poem-texts, the text itself has generally been considered definitive over its performance. Camlot's approach, and the one a new ongoing archive would offer, destabilizes such assumptions and notions of single authorship to instead foreground collaborative partnerships across time and media. This is not an entirely unprecedented move within Yeats studies that have, in recent times, recognized the higher degree of collaboration between Lady Gregory and Yeats in the writing of Cathleen ni Houlihan than was previously acknowledged, 45 and the collaborative role of Yeats's editors from George Yeats and Thomas Mark (his copyeditor at Macmillan) to later scholarly editors like George Bornstein, Peter McDonald, and others. 46 Warwick Gould responds to the critique that the work of George Yeats and Thomas Mark lacks the poet's authority while discussing the Macmillan archive editorial policy. He reminds us that "Yeats's own authority included numerous statements of delegation and his working practices show innumerable acts of delegated revision and emendation."47 Despite criticism, there is no denying that editorial interventions in Yeats's poetry are now part of the poems' textual history and their versionality and are at least useful insofar as they make room for a wider reception of variant versions neither sanctioned nor sanctified by the poet's authority. Much like introductory notes to poems by editors of critical collections, several readers in this playlist offer supplementary commentary to the poems.

Mary Robinson's reading of "The Song of Wandering Aengus" is preceded by an introduction to the life and work of Stéphane Hessel, which occupies the first fifty seconds of the 1:50 minute track. She performs this recitation in Hessel's memory after his passing in 2013. Robinson recalls the Berlin-born German's part in the French resistance, his capture by Nazis and his escape, his presence at the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, work as a diplomat and their close relationship. Additionally, she notes his support of youth-led activities and activism, his advice that they "get angry" and that he regularly performed this poem as a party piece. Robinson's reading of the ballad is remarkably consistent with twenty seconds devoted to each stanza,

maintaining the consistency of the form with its three octaves, caesuras at the end of line 4 in each stanza and its relatively consistent rhyme scheme, broken only in the repetition of "floor" as end rhyme in the second stanza, suggesting an emotional unsettling at the moment of the trout's transformation and in the otherwise consistent abcb rhyme (VP 149, l. 9, l.11). Robinson here applies the thematic weight of the poem to the two men her reading commemorates: Yeats and Hessel. Hessel's biography at the beginning of the reading allows listeners and students to recognize the determination and joyousness of the old speaker, the tempestuous moments of (political and personal) transformation, and the enduring search for an elusive (and idealized) figure and future embodied in the anthropomorphized trout. Indian students of poetry—who are likely to be unfamiliar with Irish political contexts but who study the World War II in their history syllabi-often read this poem with attention to its mythological and folklore underpinnings. A reading and introduction like Robinson's does important work in demonstrating how a political lens may be applied to the poem, allowing students to ask how contextual codes may be impacted by contemporary engagement and how poetry may have real-world critical applications.

Warwick Gould provides a short introduction to "Mohini Chatterjee" informing listeners that "this is a poem which Yeats rewrote in 1927 which he had first written as one of the earliest things he ever wrote after meeting a Brahmin sage in Dublin called Mohini Chatterjee."49 This introduction highlights Yeats's practice of rewriting over many years. The poem itself draws one's attention to Yeats's habit of paraphrasing ("spoke these, or words like these"; VP 496, 1.15) and of transforming ideas for his own esoteric undertakings ("I add in commentary"; VP 496, l.16). Yeats knew all too well that the ritualistic applications of "prayer" could be well utilized for theater, dance, and performance. Gould's recitation makes this application evident in the shift from stanza 1 to stanza 2. Where the first includes the Brahmin voice's simple expression and the changing of roles from "king" and "slave" to "fool, rascal, knave," the second stanza has the voice of an older speaker recalling and reworking ideas heard in his youth into a more symbolic commentary on arduous passions and the passage of time (VP 495-96, ll.5,6,8). Indian students in my class often come from diverse religious traditions and are not all well-versed in Hindu and Buddhist spiritual theories. While the basic ideas of passivity and detachment that are enumerated in the first stanza are part of their cultural consciousness, the global engagements with these spiritual ideas in the twentieth century are not. A reading and introduction like Gould's can enable productive discussions among students not just about the critical discourses of spirituality, but how these concepts might be critically deployed within the body of the poem, as Yeats does with this and several other poems. It can further enable Indian students to employ their own cultural positionality—in a country where religion is increasingly communalized and where the "turbulent days" of the second stanza take on distinctly political associations—to address the poem's critical reflections on spirituality and struggle (*VP* 496, l.13). The gap between the stanzas comes to hold both the passage of time and the space for critical reflection. The track and the poem, then, begin to work as a metacommentary on audienceship, interpretation, and creative performance through the discourse on detachment and the vocabulary of reincarnation with which students may engage.

Among several other readings, Dan Mulhall reads "The Wild Swans at Coole" without preface but concludes with his name and position as Irish ambassador in London at the time, indicating not only the conditions under which the poem has been chosen, but perhaps also the sociopolitical conditions for which the performance has been curated. Catriona Yeats reads "He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven" translated into the Irish to great applause that is heard in this recording. Such insertions are also present in several other readings. Unlike other more rehearsed audio recordings of Yeats's poems, this set embraces the contradiction embedded in "live recordings" and allows each reader to both curate their own selections, much as Yeats himself did in his BBC broadcasts, and to contextualize them in fresh ways to the contemporary sociocultural landscape. Its "aura," to use Walter Benjamin's term, is thus profoundly impacted, and instead of being dehistoricized in the manner of an anthology, this collection reanimates its historicized positionality for 2015.50 The poems thus collected are, in equal parts, read as a product of their times, and read in a particular moment in time. For more advanced students who examine Yeats's works in contemporary or even popular culture, the Your Yeats playlist provides useful commemorative context in a way that an open-ended archive would not. Even with the creation of an open-ended archive, then, the Your Yeats playlist would remain a resource for scholars and could usefully add to the open-ended archive if incorporated in its entirety.

This kind of recontextualization of poems' various codes is inevitable when they are are brought into classrooms worldwide. My students, among several such cases, have read W. S. Merwin's "Losing a Language" in the context of linguistic nationalism and its prevalence in India, Tony Harrison's "Them & [uz]" as speaking to their own experiences with dialect and accented speech, and have related particularly well to the "homesickness" of "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" through their lives on a residential campus. Anticipating such recontextualization also becomes important when we prepare to discuss poems in the classroom, and this is particularly true of (and even necessary with) some of the more "difficult" poems as they relate not just to individual experience but a collective one. In 2021, Elizabeth Cullingford remarked on the place of "Leda"

and the Swan" in her classroom, recognizing that it "contains three words— "girl," "knowledge," and "power"—that encapsulate the #MeToo critique of academia."51 She usefully recognizes that "Leda" arrives into this context and reframes not just our classroom conversations but is, in turn, reencoded by them and the conditions in which they are read by students. This is likely true of several of Yeats's poems. Listening to a recording of "The Second Coming" made under pandemic conditions, for instance, would give us important insights into the way students interpret the poem's themes, metaphors, symbols, and rhythms, and even how they infuse the poem with something of the varied moods and anxieties of a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic. It would further provide instructors with a means of discussing the significance and implications of "gyres" to students unfamiliar with Yeats's esoteric writing and who often struggle in the early days of literary study, to think of millennialong cycles (i.e., far exceeding human lifespans or generations) as key to the poem. Engaging with the poems in all their textual and auditory versionality would then become a means by which students develop not just their study of prosody and textual analysis, but also a means by which they delve deeper into Yeats's particular poetic practices, symbolism, esoterism, and drama with the guidance of not just their instructor but a consciously-developed pedagogical resource to bridge introductory studies of poetry with Yeats studies in particular.

A new, ongoing audio archive of crowdsourced readings would allow students of poetry to carefully attend to the linguistic, bibliographical, and contextual codes of poems through close reading, active listening, critical thought, and discussion; with organized playlists, hashtag, and search functionality, it would additionally make room for students coming to Yeats's poetry to carry out important acts of discovery such as those carried out by researchers within analogue archives but ones that are not frequently possible within classrooms with establish syllabi and time frames. In this way, it would become a resource for the poetry classroom, a resource for Yeats studies in the contemporary period, and, finally, provide a degree of guided practice and play for those looking to examine poetry outside the traditional structures of the classroom.

So, what would such an endeavor look like and require by way of technological means? Here is a brief overview. It would first need an open access parent website with enough digital storage capacity to house the files of audio texts and poem-texts. For this, preexisting sites like SoundCloud and YouTube would be inadequate since they are more wide-ranging repositories with limited functionality for the kind of guided practice that pedagogical play requires. The source texts could be organized by the collections in which they appear (akin to *The Variorum*) with hyperlinks connecting them to the

audio text part of the site. The audio texts would need to be accompanied by waveform capabilities, data about the dates of translation (if any), performance, and information regarding the engagement (likes, number of listens, number of times it is reshared). The audio texts could be organized by collection, crossreferenced into playlists for specific poems, periods, and themes to begin with. Here, a detailed index and search functionality would provide a useful guide. In its more developed stages, it could also include cross-referencing and hyperlinks to critical materials like explanatory or introductory notes (such as we see in critical edited collections), the Yeats Vision website, the Yeats Conversations (currently posted to the International Yeats Society web page), other critical texts, and digitized archival materials. Pedagogically, it would utilize interactive functionalities such as visual aids, interactive tools for prosody, discussion boards, and real-time commentary for tracks that would provide feedback to contributors. Finally, there would remain the potential in such a project to grow the versionality of the poems and collections themselves, and to incorporate other genres of Yeats's own writing with similar possibilities for pedagogical and creative interaction with the drama, nonfiction, and even esoteric writings. Of course, this endeavor would bring with it practical challenges of designing the site, hosting its contents, and the extended labor of developing and maintaining its interconnected frameworks. However, being necessarily open access and "rogue," this effort could be feasibly divided between participating entities though it would be premature to speculate on this division at the theoretical stage. Despite such challenges, it would prove a useful resource to those of us who both teach Yeats's poetry and study his literature, its modernist aesthetics, and its significance in the contemporary period.

#### Conclusion

It becomes clear upon consideration that an audio archive of poetry such as Your Yeats, composed by a single author but read by a variety of global audiences, collapses the distinctions between "poems written for everybody" and "poems written for poets" that Yeats made in his BBC broadcast *In The Poet's Parlour*, providing a democratized space for the reception and performance of poetry. <sup>52</sup> In addition, it intervenes into the changing relationship between orality and print texts in the age of rapid digital proliferation. It asks us to reconsider how we define the characteristics of these previous analogue media, and how the process of doing so can further impact otherwise "conventional prosodic studies" that "do not allow for the difference individual performance makes or for variants of individual and culturally determined reception." <sup>53</sup> Instead, we are faced with readers speaking confidently from culturally idiosyncratic positions, in individualized rhythms, accents, and voice

patterns that destabilize the poem-text, lending it something of the fluidity and ephemerality of oral performance, albeit one that is contextualized, and even fixed, in a commemorative mode. In this way, the poem's linguistic, bibliographic, and contextual codes are all impacted and, arguably, enhanced, by the acts of contributing to such an archive.

A larger, ongoing, crowdsourced archive would enable readers to use their knowledge of Yeats's poems, his own readings and broadcasts, and/ or his manuscript alterations to inform their reading, thus expanding our understanding of what constitutes the text and its various unstable codes through critically informed performance. Such an archive and its site would provide subject matter for comparative study, and an opportunity for critical engagement by listening to and translating the texts' "sound pattern, certain referential statements from the poem-what one might think of as the conventional meaning of its 'message," and realizing those in performance.<sup>54</sup> Bringing multiple iterations of important poems together in a collective undertaking, this group of reader-performers would extend the cubist aural approach to poems and their possibilities that Your Yeats began to demonstrate. Finally, such a site would become an added resource for understanding these poems in multidimensional ways, of reading poem-texts as vessels for information and, simultaneously, art. There remains room to construct such an ever-expanding archive and pedagogical resource for Yeats's poetry where students of poetry may exercise active listening, prosody, critical discussions, creative practices of translation, performance, and preservation on a global scale, effectively lending their classrooms the kind of porosity that exists among digital archives. In continuing to read Yeats's texts aloud 150 years after his birth, we have in the 2015 archive a commemoration of the works, the further elegizing of a writer whom W. H. Auden declared in 1939 was now "scattered among a hundred cities" and whose writings, he prophesied, "are modified in the guts of the living." 55 This modification is, hopefully, endless.

#### **ENDNOTES**

- "Introduction," Activities by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Support of Yeats 2015: 2. Accessed May 18, 2022. This report can be found as a PDF: www.dfa.ie/media/dfa/alldfawebsitemedia/ourrolesandpolicies/tradeandpromotion/Yeats-2015 -- Report.pdf.
- 2 Where I discuss the Yeats 2015 project at large, the name has been italicized. Where I refer to the Yeats 2015 account on SoundCloud, it has not.
- The parent website for the Yeats 2015 project is no longer available. An archive of the webpage can be found at https://web.archive.org/web/20210417163751/https://yeats2015.com/your-yeats-page/, accessed May 18, May 2022.
- "Yeats 2015," SoundCloud, https://soundcloud.com/yeats2015, accessed May 18, 2022.

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- 5 The following details were accurate as of April 20, 2022, and originate from "Yeats 2015," SoundCloud, www.soundcloud.com/yeats2015, accessed May 18, 2022.
- 6 "Introduction," Activities by the Department of Foreign Affairs.
- 7 "Your Yeats," Yeats 2015, SoundCloud, <a href="https://soundcloud.com/yeats2015/sets/your-yeats">https://soundcloud.com/yeats2015/sets/your-yeats</a>, accessed May 19, 2022.
- 8 "About," Lagan Online, <a href="https://laganonline.co/about-us/">https://laganonline.co/about-us/</a>, accessed May 18, 2022. Lagan Online is the response by Lagan Press to "irreversible change in the publishing industry," which has been "disrupted radically by technology" by giving up print publishing and emphasizing their work through the digital medium.
- I distinguish the number of "plays" received by a track on the SoundCloud web page by clicking the "play" button on the audio player from the plays of Yeats that are referred to here as "drama." The term "plays" indicates each time the play button has been clicked but does not necessarily indicate that the track has been heard in full.
- "Imogen Stewart on Maud Gonne," Yeats 2015. SoundCloud, https://soundcloud.com/yeats2015/imogen-stewart-on-maud-gonne?in=yeats2015/sets/your-yeats, acessed May 18, 2022.
- Here, I go by the publication dates of the collections in which poems appear, as recorded in Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspac, eds., *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats* (New York: Macmillan, 1957). I also date the dramas according to their years of publication. The track "Imogen Stewart on Maud Gonne" is included in the total number of tracks, but not in the breakdown since it is not a text by Yeats.
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- 13 George Bornstein, Material Modernism: The Politics of the Page (New York: Cambridge University Press, [2001] 2006), 40.
- 14 Quoted in Jason Camlot, "Historicist Audio Forensics: The Archive of Voices as Repository of Material and Conceptual Artefacts," 19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century 21 (2015): 8.
- 15 Matthew Rubery, "Victorian Literature Out Loud: Digital Audio Resources for the Classroom," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 14, no. 1 (2009): 136.
- 16 Rubery, "Victorian Literature Out Loud," 137.
- 17 Librivox defines itself as a "library of audiobooks" where "volunteers record chapters of books in the public domain" that are then released free of cost as audio files on the internet; it works with texts from Project Gutenberg and is hosted by the Internet Archives and contains several Yeats poems in collections of short poetry and some plays and prose texts. "About LibriVox," LibriVox: free public domain audiobooks, <a href="https://librivox.org/pages/about-librivox/">https://librivox.org/pages/about-librivox/</a>, accessed May 18, 2022.
- 18 Rob Doggett, "Yeats and Digital Pedagogy," International Yeats Studies 4, no. 1 (2020): 52.
- 19 Borsetin, Material Modernism, 34.
- 20 Bornstein (1996), 150.
- 21 Dogget, "Yeats and Digital Pedagogy," 45.
- 22 Doggett, "Yeats and Digital Pedagogy," 50.
- 23 Doggett, "Yeats and Digital Pedagogy," 51. Emphasis in the original.
- 24 The student discussions mentioned in this article come from my introduction to literature course 2021-22 and poetry course 2022-23 at FLAME University, India.
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- 28 W. B. Yeats, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," (CW1, 39).
- 29 Mike Chasar, "Orality, Literacy, and the Memorized Poem," Poetry 205, no. 4 (January 2015): 376-77.
- 30 Chasar, "Orality, Literacy, and the Memorized Poem, 378.
- 31 Chasar, "Orality, Literacy, and the Memorized Poem, 378.
- 32 This point is also made in Chasar, "Orality, Literacy, and the Memorized Poem," 378.

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- 34 W. B. Yeats, "Modern Poetry: A Broadcast (1936)," (CW5, 102)...
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- 36 Abigail De Kosnik, Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 2.
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- 39 "Nawal Abusway (Palestine) reading in Arabic 'Aedh wishes for the Cloths of Heaven' by WB Yeats." Yeats 2015. SoundCloud. https://soundcloud.com/yeats2015/nawal-abusway-palestinereading-in-ar-abic-aedh-wishes-for-the-cloths-of-heaven-by-wb-yeats?in=yeats2015/sets/your-yeats, accessed May 18, 2022.
- 40 Camlot, "Historicist Audio Forensics," 3.
- 41 Camlot, "Historicist Audio Forensics," 5-6.
- 42 Camlot, "Historicist Audio Forensics," 6.
- 43 Camlot, "Historicist Audio Forensics," 6.
- 44 Tom Chadwick and Pieter Vermeulen, "Literature in the New Archival Landscape," Lit: Literature and Interpretation Theory 31, no. 1 (2020): 4.
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