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978-0-521-64527-0 - Yeats's Nations: Gender, Class, and Irishness

Marjorie Howes

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Yeats, it has been claimed, invented a country and called it Ireland. His plays, poetry and prose record his life-long commitment to establishing new forms of individual and collective identity. Marjorie Howes's study is the first sustained attempt to examine Yeats's invention of Irishness through the most recent theoretical work on literature, gender and nationalism in post-colonial cultures. She explores the complex, often contradictory ways Yeats's politics are refracted through his writing. Yeats had a complicated relation to British imperialism and the English literary tradition, an intense but troubled commitment to Irish nationalism, and a fascination with the Anglo-Irish as a declining ruling class. As a Free State senator, he participated in Ireland's postcolonial project of nation-building; he also confronted his own isolation as a Protestant intellectual in a deeply Catholic country. The various Irish nations he invented, she claims, are intensely powerful imaginative responses to a period of violent historical change. By placing Yeats's politics and poetics at the centre of debates on nationalism and gender currently occupying critics in postcolonial studies, Howes reveals the contemporary cultural codes governing representations of class and gender embedded in the poet's concepts of nationality. Ironically, in Yeats's works, the unity of the Irish nation is embodied in the relationship between the Irish peasantry and the Anglo-Irish aristocracy, and excludes the Catholic middle classes. Every public proclamation on national destiny involves an intensely private scrutiny of gender and sexuality. This accessible and thorough study will appeal to all interested in Irish studies, postcolonial theory, and the relationship between nationalism and sexuality.

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## *Abbreviations*

- AY* *The Autobiography of William Butler Yeats*, New York: Macmillan, 1965.
- CT* *The Celtic Twilight*, London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1893.
- KLI* *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats, Volume I, 1865–1895*, ed. John Kelly, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986.
- EI* *Essays and Introductions*, New York: Macmillan, 1961.
- EX* *Explorations*, New York: Macmillan, 1962.
- L* *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Alan Wade, New York: Macmillan, 1955.
- LNI* *Letters to the New Island*, ed. George Bornstein and Hugh Witemeyer, New York: Macmillan, 1989.
- Mem* *Memoirs*, transcribed and ed. Denis Donoghue, London: Macmillan, 1972.
- SS* *The Senate Speeches of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Donald R. Pearce, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1960.
- UPI* *Uncollected Prose, Vol. I*, collected and ed. John P. Frayne, London: Macmillan, 1970.
- UPII* *Uncollected Prose, Vol. II*, collected and ed. John P. Frayne and Colton Johnson, New York: Macmillan, 1975.
- VP* *The Variorum Edition of the Plays of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Russell K. Alspach, London: Macmillan, 1966.
- VPI* *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach, New York: Macmillan, 1957.
- V* *A Vision*, New York: Macmillan, 1937.
- VA* *A Critical Edition of Yeats's A Vision (1925)*, ed. George Mills Harper, London: Macmillan, 1978.
- GY* *Always Your Friend: The Donne-Yeats Letters 1893–1938*, ed. Anna MacBride White and A. Norman Jeffares, New York and London: Norton, 1992.