

# The Problem of Crazy Jane

*Margaret Mills Harper\**

University of Limerick, Ireland

\*Address correspondence to Prof Margaret Harper, Glucksman Chair in Contemporary Writing in English, School of English, Irish, and Communication, University of Limerick, Ireland. Email: Margaret.harper@ul.ie

**Abstract:** In the 1920s, after the Irish War of Independence had ended in civil war, partition, and a deeply conservative Free State, W. B. Yeats, Ireland's most famous poet, found himself in creative and personal crisis. During this period, W. B. Yeats produced a series of poems very unlike his earlier work: short, harsh lyrics gathered in a collection entitled *Words for Music Perhaps*. The poems often speak through the voice of an abject Other, a seemingly stereotypical 'poor old woman' who transgresses norms of language, behaviour, ideologies of religion and sexuality, and western philosophic thought. Crazy Jane can seem to represent a betrayal of Yeats's own nationalist achievements as well as an unethical appropriative practice. Yeats's poetic ventriloquism is problematic also in that it implies practices like ghostly visitation and daimonic possession. It is finally 'music perhaps': a dynamic contrapuntal aesthetic and critical energy that helps readers understand late Yeats and his place in English-language modernism.

**Keywords:** W. B. Yeats, Crazy Jane, modernism, ageing, crisis, mask