Abstract
This paper will analyse the 454 uses of the word ‘but’ in the Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats as a ‘poetic code’ for suspending the endings of poems, for achieving what might be termed ‘the willing suspension’ of closure. The analysis will draw from the 30 categories detailing accepted usages of ‘but’ listed in the Oxford English Dictionary, and on Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik’s A Grammar of Contemporary English (1973), and on Huddleston and Pullum’s The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language (2002). In terms of formal analysis I am indebted to Nicky Grene’s Yeats’s Poetic Codes (2008) and to Helen Vendler’s Our Secret Discipline: Yeats and Lyric Form (2007). Conscious that it was not until the 30s that Yeats knew what the word ‘syntax’ meant, and that many of his so-called ‘poetic codes’ represented a rehearsed accommodation between achieved technique and ‘that old nonchalance of the hand’, this paper will focus on aesthetics rather than intentions.

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