

**THE MINISTRY OF HIGHER AND SPECIAL SECONDARY
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QUALIFICATION WORK

**to obtain Bachelor's Degree on Specialty 5120100 – English
Philology on theme
*“Life and Critical Reception of William Butler Yeats’ Works”***

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INTRODUCTION

Topicality of the research question of this research is determined by little attention paid to the studies of British writers. In the collection of base concepts and principles of the Idea of National Independence the governments' attitude to the literature is defined in the following way: «Literature and art are the efficient facility of the initiation of people to rich cultural-historic and spiritual-moral values, treasures of world civilization»¹. The study of foreign literature is also one of the demands of the realization of «National personnel training program». «To achieve our strategic purpose – the formation of flourishing and strong democratic state and civil society – it is essential to form spiritual-rich person who owns independent world outlook and independent thinking, who is guided by the priceless heritage of our primogenitors and common to all mankind values»². That is why «it is necessary to reinforce the attention of the government to the literature and art, to the problems of the creative intellectuals».

For a quite long time the deficiency of attention to the study of mythological elements in literature was the reason of its poor development. The names and the works of many talented writers stayed unknown, despite the fact that many of them introduced something new into the literature - new styles, directions, ideas, approaches etc. One of such writers is William Butler Yeats.

The aim of the qualification work is to study Celtic elements of mythology and folklore in William Butler Yeats's works and identify his motifs in composing his poems.

According to the aim of the research the following **tasks** were set before the research:

- to study the biography of William Butler Yeats;
- to study relevant literature on the critical reception of Yeats's poetry;

¹ Миллий истиқлол ғояси: асосий тушунча ва тамойиллари. –Т.: Ўзбекистон, 2001. – 64 б.

² Same source

- to analyze his works in terms of symbolism and use of symbols in poems;
- to study his most famous works in order to trace the elements of Celtic mythology and folklore;
- to examine the aims and purposes of Yeats in using the Irish and Celtic elements in his works.

Scientific scrutiny of the research. Unterecker, John Eugene: *A Reader's Guide to William Butler Yeats* (1959). This study gives general information about William Butler Yeats, his life and works. *Yeats: A Collection of Critical Essays* ed. by John Unterecker (1963). This book is a general collection of critical essays on Yeats. These essays make Yeats's aesthetic and philosophical stance quite clear. Parkinson, Thomas: *W.B. Yeats: the Later Poetry* (1964). As the title suggests, this book relates to Yeats's poetry written during the later part of his life. *W. B. Yeats: the Critical Heritage* ed. by A. Norman Jeffares (1977). The book truly reveals Yeats as a link between 19th and 20th century. Bramsbäck, Birgit: *Folklore and W. B. Yeats: the Function of Folklore Elements in Three Early Plays* (1984). This book reveals the Irishness of Yeats. His childhood memories of Sligo haunted him during his entire life. He was extremely interested in old Celtic culture with its folklore and a saga which is aptly expressed not only his poems but also in his plays. In fact, it was this instinct that led him to set up Abbey Theatre to revive old Gaelic literature. Jeffares, Alexander Norman: *W.B. Yeats: a New Biography* (1988). The biography aptly captures the details of incidents and events in the life of Yeats. Pierce, David: *Yeats's Worlds: Ireland, England and the Poetic Imagination* (1995).

Novelty of the research. The work and its topic is new in itself, as the poetry of William Butler Yeats has not been studied by the Uzbek literary scholars and his works are not translated into Uzbek. As the main achievement of the work we may mention the study of how Celtic and Irish elements of mythology influenced the development of Yeats as a poet and how these elements are depicted masterly by Yeats.

Object of the research is Celtic elements used in the poetry of Yeats and their use and influence on the overall style and motifs of the poems.

Subject of the research is William Butler Yeats early poetry on Irish nationalism, poems and plays created 1860 and 1890.

Methods of the research. During the research work we tried to employ such method of literary study as review of related literature, poetical analysis, comparative study of literary works of Yeats.

The theoretical and practical value is in the presentation of analysis of Yeats poetry in terms of their themes, motifs and origins. Moreover the work reveals underlying symbols in the poems of Yeats which is truly helpful for the men of literature and people who are going to work on the translation of Yeats's poetry. In addition, the materials presented in the qualification work can be used in teaching English literature in pedagogical institutes and universities. They can also be used by students of philological and foreign literature faculties in compiling their course papers and other research oriented tasks.

Structure of the qualification work. The work consist of an introduction, the main part with its two chapters, conclusion and the list of literature used and referenced.

The first chapter of the work presents review of literature on the biography, critical reception of Yeats and his use of symbolism in poetry.

The second chapter gives the outline of analysis of Yeats's works done with the aim of identifying key Celtic elements and figures in his poetry.

Chapter I. Life and Critical Reception of William Butler Yeats’ Works

1.1 Brief Biography of William Butler Yeats

On 13 June 1865 William Butler Yeats is born in Sandymount, Ireland as the first child of John Butler Yeats and Susan Mary Pollexfen. His father is a successful barrister at the time while his mother stays at home to look after the newborn baby. Susan Pollexfen came from a wealthy Anglo-Irish family who owned a prosperous milling and shipping business in County Sligo, and soon after William's birth the family relocates there to stay with her extended family. Sligo becomes synonym for Yeats' child- and boyhood and in one of his later letters he even mentions it as his “native place”³. During his youth and his many visits there he falls in love with the peacefulness of the countryside and the beauty of its nature. It is there also that he will come in contact with the Irish folklore and faery tales that would become a constant influence in both his life and his work. These stories are told to him by the local population – among them many of his own family – and early accounts of Yeats already betray a certain fascination for the tales, the fantastical worlds they conjure up and for the effect they have on people, including himself.

In the summer of 1866 Susan Mary Yeats – or “Lily”, as she is known to her family and friends – is born. Yeats' eldest sister – and the second child of a family that will count five children in total – will later become an embroiderer associated with both the Celtic Revival and the Arts and Crafts Movement. In 1867 John decides to give up his career in law to pursue his dream of becoming a painter. To support him, the entire

³ Wade, Allan (1968) *A Bibliography of the Writings of W. B. Yeats*. Third edition, revised and edited by Russell K. Alspach. London: Rupert Hart Davies.

family moves to London later that year where he has more chance of finding success. There, three more children are born:

Elizabeth Corbett “Lolly” in 1868, Robert³ in 1870, and finally John “Jack” Butler⁴ in 1871. Growing up in London is especially hard for Yeats who now spends time in Sligo only on holidays or when he is sent there to live with his grandmother and aunts for certain periods because of the expanding family. The calm and familiar countryside forms a shrill contrast to the noisy and dirty industrial town of London, which does not feel – and never will – like home to him. This becomes painfully clear when from 1875 to 1880 he attends the Godolphin primary school at Hammersmith, where he feels himself an Irish boy among foreigners and barbarians. The antipathetic feelings Yeats develops in these years towards the British capital will never completely resolve, or as he himself puts it in a letter from 1887 to Katharine Tynan⁵: “Any breath from Ireland blows pleasurably in this hateful London where you cannot go five paces without seeing some wretched object broken either by wealth or poverty.”⁴

By 1880 the Land War is stirring great unrest among rural Ireland and the Yeats family is forced to return after difficulties have arisen with the County Kildare property owned by Yeats' father. As a member of the former Protestant Ascendancy John Yeats still owns some land in County Kildare, but when the troubles break out he sees no other solution than to return to Ireland and to take care of things himself. Luckily, John and his tenants are able to resolve the matter without any violence, but he thinks it best to stay in Ireland for the time being anyway. Even though there is little real harm done, this event shows how unstable the situation in Ireland was at the time of Yeats' youth and how no one could escape from

⁴ Wade, Allan (1968) *A Bibliography of the Writings of W. B. Yeats*. Third edition, revised and edited by Russell K. Alspach. London: Rupert Hart Davies.

it. Yeats never really spoke that much about this period in his life, but one could ask himself how important this influence has been and what marks it may have left on him. After all, he was only fifteen years old when his family suddenly had to move to Ireland in the midst of the Land War and the Ascendancy of which he was a member was undergoing a crisis of identity.

However supportive his family was about the changes that Ireland was going through, there is no denying that these also directly disadvantaged his heritage.

After settling in Dublin in 1880 – first in the city centre and later in the suburb of Howth – Yeats resumes his education later that year at the Erasmus Smith High School, where he graduates in 1883. His father urges him to go to Trinity College and continue the family tradition, but Yeats refuses because he wants to study art instead. From 1884 to 1886 he takes classes at the Metropolitan School of Art where he meets George Russell⁶. Russell's interest in mysticism influences Yeats greatly and the two will remain friends until Russell's death in 1935. Yeats also attends the Royal Hibernian Academy School, yet around 1886 he suddenly decides to give up his art studies to become a writer. Coincidence or not, but in the same year his father thinks the time is right to move back to London and the family returns to Bedford Park where they had lived for a while before coming to Ireland.

Yeats finds it difficult to be heard in London and in the first year only one poem gets printed in an English periodical. Subsequently, he still sends out his poems and articles to Ireland. It are two American papers who respond, however, among them the Boston Pilot in which he can publish with an introduction from John O'Leary. The second half of 1887 is spent in Sligo where Yeats finishes his long narrative poem *The Wanderings of Oisín*, followed by a compilation of Irish Fairy and Folk

Tales the year after that. Despite these publications Yeats is paid very little and all the money he has goes to his family. His father, however, urges him to stay a writer and keep his independence. He still lives in London – which he still hates – but starts to meet some interesting people there as well, like William Morris, W. E. Henley, and Oscar Wilde. Finally, in 1889 his first book of verse, *The Wanderings of Oisín and Other Poems* appears, and Maud Gonne⁹ comes to Bedford Park. Yeats instantly falls for her beauty and enthusiasm and begins working on *The Countess Kathleen*, a play he writes with her in mind. By 1891 the play is finished and awaits publication. Yeats is slowly but definitely building up a reputation and things are finally starting to look as if they can only get better.

1891 is very eventful and tumultuous for Yeats. Early in the year Ernest Rhys¹⁰ and he found the Rhymers' Club¹¹ and in the winter a group of kindred spirits meets at Bedford Park to discuss the plans for an Irish Literary Society. In between, Charles Stewart Parnell dies, leaving Ireland vacant and divided. Yeats attends his funeral in Dublin, but returns to London shortly after. In the early summer of 1892 the Irish Literary Society is founded by T. W. Rolleston¹³ and Yeats with the next scheme already on its way. Yeats wants a National Publishing Company¹⁴ – a “Library of Ireland” – to bring out cheap series of good books. He informs Sir Charles Gavan Duffy about his plans and his wish to appoint Duffy as director of the company. When Yeats visits some family in Sligo, however, he is informed that Duffy has stolen his idea and has founded *The New Irish Library* – as the project is eventually called. Partly because of this setback, Yeats returns to London at the end of the year feeling disillusioned.

But the idealist Yeats does not give up just like that and he has more ideas he wants to see accomplished. Together with a close group of

friends he starts to work out the idea of an Irish Literary Theatre. These friends are J. M. Synge, George Moore, Edward Martyn, and Lady Gregory. Yeats has just met Synge while he was staying in Paris¹⁷ and the two have become instant friends. George Moore he knew already after helping him with his book *Evelyn Innes* and Moore had reviewed *The Countess Kathleen* as “the finest verse play written since Shakespeare.”⁵ At the time, Yeats was staying with Martyn at Tulira Castle where he also met Lady Gregory. From now on, her house at Coole Park would become Yeats' home for the summer. Still in 1897 and well into the next year Yeats partakes in celebrations and demonstrations commemorating the Rebellion of 1798 and even protests against a visit from Queen Victoria to Ireland.

1899 is a very creative year as it finally starts with rehearsals of the plays for the Irish Literary Theatre performances, which take place in May at the Antient Concert Rooms in Dublin. In addition, Moore and Yeats work on a play together telling the ancient story of Diarmuid and Grania. This play is finished and produced in 1901, the same year the three years' experiment of the Irish Literary Theatre is brought to an end. Not long after, however, a little company of amateur players under the organisation and direction of the brothers Willie and Frank Fay adopts the name of the Irish National Theatre Society and continues the work, with Yeats as President and Maud Gonne, Douglas Hyde, and George Russell as Vice-Presidents. In 1902 the Society produces Yeats' *Cathleen ni Houlihan* alongside a play by Æ on the Deirdre legend. After the successful undertaking of *Diarmuid and Grania*, Yeats suggests to continue his collaboration with Moore, but quickly returns to his decision again. Moore takes this action badly and threatens Yeats he is going to

⁵ Wade, Allan (1968) *A Bibliography of the Writings of W. B. Yeats*. Third edition, revised and edited by Russell K. Alspach. London: Rupert Hart Davies.

write a novel on the same theme they were going to use. Hastily and with the help of Lady Gregory and Hyde, Yeats writes his play called *Where There is Nothing* in the hope of being quicker than Moore. It works and nothing is heard of Moore's novel. The two are not on speaking terms for some time, however, and the breach in their relationship will never be completely closed.

After Yeats' mother dies in 1900 from a lingering disease, the entire family is left behind struggling. Two years later they decide to move back to Ireland and settle at Churchtown, Dundrum just outside of Dublin. Elizabeth starts a small printing press there – called the Dun Emer Press at this time – with the help from her eldest brother, publishing his work as well as that of a selection of other Irish writers. In 1903 she publishes Yeats' play *On Baile's Strand* which he intends to form part of a cycle of plays surrounding the Irish mythical hero Cú Chulainn. Later that year Yeats crosses the Atlantic Ocean to go on his first lecture tour in the U.S.A. The tour is hugely successful and earns Yeats a steady income.

1904 is again a landmark in his life as it marks the opening of the Abbey Theatre – the successor of the Irish Literary Theatre. The Theatre's company still consists of unpaid amateurs and is at first run on a democratic basis where decisions are made by vote. This proves to be an impracticable method, however, and in 1906 Yeats, Lady Gregory, and Synge are appointed as Directors. Although Yeats loves his work at the Abbey, the responsibilities are a burden and prove to be a hindrance for his own work. He spends so much time doing things at and for the Abbey that little or no time is left to write himself. Not everything runs smoothly for the Abbey and its Directors either, and after internal dissensions the brothers Fay – who still have an active role in the company – resign from their positions.

1909 starts tragically when Synge dies after a long illness. Although Yeats knew he was ill and had visited him shortly before his death, the news still comes as a shock to him.

Yeats not only loses his friend but also a business partner and has to take on Synge's responsibilities at the Abbey now as well. The next year is somewhat ambiguous for Yeats as it holds both prestige and more grief. By now, Yeats is finally recognised as one of the leading men of letters in Ireland and gets invited to become a member of the Academic Committee of the Royal Society of Literature. He is also offered to succeed Edward Dowden as Professor of English Literature at Trinity College, but passes on the occasion due to his bad eyesight and the strenuous work the job would require. Finally, he is awarded a Civil List pension and accepts it on the terms that he remains free to undertake any political activities in Ireland he might wish.

In September news from his sister in Sligo reaches him with the death of his uncle and old friend George Pollexfen. George had played a large part in Yeats' upbringing in Sligo and had influenced the young mind with his country legends and belief in the supernatural. Yeats is devastated, even more so because he is allowed no time to grieve. The contract between the Abbey Theatre and its financier Miss Horniman is indeed running to an end and in order to gather funds, Yeats has to give lectures. At the outbreak of World War I Yeats is in England – having just returned from his second American lecture tour – but he returns to Coole for the late summer. Life seems to be going its way pretty much undisturbed, but Yeats is troubled about the future of Ireland – and by extension of that of Europe and the world⁶.

On 24 April 1916, Yeats is staying at the country in England when an insurrection known as the Easter Rising takes place in Dublin. More than

⁶ Stoll, John (1971) *The Great Deluge: A Yeats Bibliography*. New York: Whitson.

by the event itself, Yeats is dismayed by its aftermath. After seven days of violent resistance, the leaders of the uprising are captured, trialled, and executed under British law. Among them are many of Yeats' old friends and acquaintances, including Maud Gonne's husband John MacBride. These changes in the political and national landscape make Yeats feel he should live in Ireland again, whereupon he buys a ruined cottage under an old tower at Ballylee which will become his summer residence. At the age of fifty-one, he might have also had the feeling it was time to settle down and get married. He successively proposes to Maud Gonne – for the fifth time already – her daughter Iseult, and finally to George Hyde-Lees²⁰. Both Gonne women refuse him, but George accepts his offer and the two get married in the autumn of 1917. In spite of Yeats' initial feelings of remorse about the marriage, their daughter Anne Butler is born in February 1919, followed by a son William Michael two years later.

By the end of 1921 the self-governing Irish Free State is created, replacing the Irish Republic as a part of Britain after two years of guerilla war. Ireland finally seems to have gained the freedom it has been fighting for since the sixteenth century, but a Civil War breaks out after the Irish cannot agree on the extent of their independence. Yeats again feels he should be in Ireland – he was living in Oxford at this time for his work – and the young family moves to Dublin in 1922. This is also the year that his father John dies. John had been living in New York since 1908, despite several pleas of his family to come back to Ireland⁷.

But he liked it there and on the few occasions that Yeats could visit him – mostly during his American lecture tours – he too had expressed his fondness after seeing his father so content. The happiness of John's late

⁷ Cross, K. G. W. and R. T. Dunlop (1971) *A Bibliography of Yeats Criticism 1887-1965*. Forward by A. Norman Jeffares. London: Macmillan.

life and the knowledge he had died without pain or the loss of creativity eased the pain for Yeats, but it was a great loss anyway.

Luckily, the rest of the year and the next one bring some exciting news and probably the greatest honour Yeats could receive. First, he becomes a member of the Irish Senate – a post he will hold for the next six years – and then he is awarded a D.Litt. degree by Trinity College. But in November 1923 he is granted the most prestigious acknowledgement of all when he gets the Nobel Prize in Literature “for his always inspired poetry, which in a highly artistic form gives expression to the spirit of a whole nation.” He goes to collect the prize himself and in his lecture to the Royal Academy of Sweden pays tribute to Lady Gregory and J. M. Synge who have influenced and supported him throughout his career. A few years later he expands his political career by becoming Chairman for a committee designed to advise on the first coinage for the Free State.

1927 marks a first general breakdown in health for Yeats. He is prescribed complete rest and travels through Spain with his wife in the hope the warm climate will do him good. A year later his office at the Senate comes to an end, but when he is asked to stand for reelection, he refuses due to his failing strength. The Spanish temperatures and weather remarkably improve his condition, so much even that he decides to stay in Rapallo. There he finds the peace and quiet he needs to recover, and together with Ezra Pound⁸ he enjoys a life of idleness.

In 1930 Yeats recovers from a collapse caused by Maltese fever, but later in the year he feels strong enough to return to Ireland. Although Yeats does not mention it himself, it is possible that he found out that Lady Gregory's health was failing rapidly and therefore wanted to speed

⁸ Jochum, K. P. S. and Allan Wade (1978) *W. B. Yeats: A Classified Bibliography of Criticism*, including addition to Allan Wade's 'Bibliography of W. B. Yeats' and a section on the Irish Literary and Dramatic Revival. Folkstone: Dawson.

up his return. At the request of her family he stays at Coole, where she will eventually die in the spring of 1932 – bringing an end to his personal and creative bond with

the place. Since his family has grown up and he has always preferred the countryside to the city, Yeats and his wife move outside of Dublin – first to Rathfarnham and then to Riversdale, the latter being his last home in Ireland.

In the meantime, he receives degrees at Oxford and Cambridge and starts sending out invitations to the proposed members of his latest and last scheme, the Irish Academy of Letters. He also goes on a final American lecture tour, earning a substantial sum which he uses for his new Academy. In June 1935 his seventieth birthday is celebrated with a grand banquet in his honour. Still struggling with his health he goes to Menton and Cap Martin in the South of France to tide over the winters of 1938 and 1939. Although failing in strength, he continues to write on his last play of the Cú Chulainn cycle, *The Death of Cuchulain*.

On 26 January 1939, while staying in Menton, Yeats suddenly becomes gravely ill and dies two days later at the age of seventy-three. It was his wish to be buried at Drumcliffe in Sligo, but on the chance he would die in France, that would do as well. He is buried at Roquebrune-Cap-Martin, but Mrs. Yeats feels he should come home. Because of the War, however, it takes nine more years before Yeats is finally laid to rest at his beloved countryside in Sligo. His epitaph is taken from the closing lines of one of his last poems, *Under Ben Bulbin*:

“Cast a cold eye

On life, on death.

Horseman, pass by!” (“*The Poems of W. B. Yeats*” 640)

1.2 Criticism of William Butler Yeats's Works

The greatest Irish poet and a monumental figure in earlier twentieth-century literature, William Butler Yeats represents, in his life and work, the transition from late Romanticism to the Modernism which came to dominate literature in English in the period between the two world wars. While closely associated with Ireland and its turbulent political and social history throughout his lifetime, Yeats developed, as a poet and a thinker, into a trenchant and memorable commentator on human life at large, in a creative career of poetry, drama and prose, extending over more than half a century⁹.

'If a powerful and benevolent spirit has shaped the destiny of this world, we can better gather that destiny through the words that have shaped the heart's desire of the world.' And that's exactly what William Butler Yeats did: he caught the heart's desire. He caught it in language which is beautiful and which is dripping in imagery - and, particularly in the early poems - mysticism. *The Song of Wandering Aengus*, *The Stolen Child*. Joyce said of him that he had a surrealist imagination few painters could match. He was born in 1865 to John Butler Yeats the son of a rector in the Church of Ireland and to Susan Pollexfen whose shipbuilding family came from Sligo- where Yeats at his request is buried, beneath Ben Bulbin's head. His epitaph? 'Cast a cold eye/ On life, on death/ Horseman, pass by'. Yeats learned early that art is what matters. His father was a solicitor and he gave up his practice to study painting in London. Indeed Yeats later studied art in Dublin before in one of literature's luckiest volte - face he decided on poetry. The publication in 1889 when Yeats was twenty-four of *The Wanderings of Osian* was a seminal moment, not only in Irish literary history, but also its political

⁹ <http://www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&UID=4833>

history. Yeats's book, based on the Fenian cycle, brought Irish mythology to the Irish people in English - 'the language' as he pointed out 'in which modern Ireland thinks and does its business'. This was at a time in Ireland when there was a powerful movement to rescue the Gaelic language¹⁰.

In Irish literature Yeats resembles a tidal wave. And the tide was not only poetical. In 1904 Yeats set up the National Theatre of Ireland - The Abbey Theatre with Lady Gregory and he worked unceasingly as playwright and director in its cause. In his Nobel speech to the Swedish Academy he chose as his subject 'The Irish Dramatic Movement' 'I would not be here were I not the symbol of that movement...the nationalism we called up was both romantic and poetical.' Well, up to a point. Yeats had a genius - a generous genius for discovering genius in others and amongst those he discovered were two of Ireland's greatest, Synge and O'Casey. Their plays were poetical certainly - romantic? not necessarily. The Abbey audience, probably the most hyper sensitive in history, rioted - enraged by the portrait of themselves in Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* and O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars*. Yeats harangued them from the stage - 'you have disgraced yourselves again' - and he persevered. This strength of character and courage in the face of prejudice which was noted by Eliot is fundamental to his astonishing achievements. He once tried to get a 'bill of divorcement' through the Irish Senate. He failed. That he tried at all is remarkable. Finally he refused to allow himself to be destroyed by the agony of his unreciprocated, life-long obsession with Maud Gonne, an obsession that would have felled lesser men.

She exploded into his life in 1889 - just after the publication of *The Wanderings of Oisín*. She was young, twenty-two, tall with flaming red

¹⁰ <http://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/poetryperformance/yeats/josephinehart/aboutyeats.html>

hair but it was her passion that 'began all the trouble of my life'. She took possession of his soul and when the soul is lost, all is lost. He had found the love of his life, she, an ardent republican, had perhaps found a poet for the cause. She was a magnificent creature - brave but dangerous. 'She lived in storm and strife,/ Her soul had such desire/ For what proud death may bring/ That it could not endure /The common good of life'. And therein lies the pity. Her fanaticism swept away much that was good in her life. His enduring love, expressed in poems of genius, gave us the haunting poetry of the exultant yet broken heart - A Woman Homer Sung, No Second Troy, He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven, The Folly of Being Comforted and many, many more. She married the revolutionary Sean Mac Bride. The confirmation of their marriage was, Yeats said, 'like lightning through me'. Yeats, in his fifties, finally married Georgie Hyde-Lees with whom he had two children.

Easter 1916, his greatest political poem, of which he wrote many (Parnell's Funeral, September 1913, The Ghost of Roger Casement) was inspired by the tragic military failure of the rebellion led by Patrick Pearse who, with other leaders of the rebellion including Sean Mac Bride, was executed. The iconic line 'A terrible beauty is born' contains both a warning and a blessing. The rhythms and repetitions in this poem seem to keep pace with the destiny of the men: 'Hearts to one purpose alone / Through summer and winter seem/ Enchanted to a stone/ To trouble the living stream'...Too long a sacrifice /Can make a stone of the heart/O when may it suffice?' Yeats, uniquely amongst poets, wrote some of his greatest poetry in his sixties and seventies. Eliot wrote of this late work: 'Maturing as a poet means maturing as a whole man... out of his intense experience he now expressed universal truths. An artist by serving his art with his entire integrity, is at the same time rendering the greatest service he can to his country and to the whole world.' The late poems include the

The Municipal Gallery Revisited, The Statues and The Circus Animals Desertion - a poem in which the thread is pulled taut between life and art 'Maybe at last being but a broken man/ I must be satisfied with my heart' and continues, 'Now that my ladder's gone/ I must lie down where all ladders start/ In the foul rag and bone shop of the heart.' Where else?

The early poetry of William Butler Yeats is read and interpreted with particular attention paid to Yeats's ambitions as a specifically Irish poet. Yeats's commitment to a poetry of symbol is explored in "The Song of the Wandering Aengus," a fable of poetic vocation. "A Coat," composed at the end of Yeats's struggle to bring about an Irish national theater, shows the poet reconceiving his style and in search of a new audience. "The Fisherman" is read as a revision of "The Song of the Wandering Aengus" which reflects this new set of concerns.

One thing that Marxist criticism has not succeeded in doing is to trace the connection between "tendency" and literary style. The subject-matter and imagery of a book can be explained in sociological terms, but its texture seemingly cannot. Yet some such connection there must be. One knows, for instance, that a Socialist would not write like Chesterton or a Tory imperialist like Bernard Shaw, though how one knows it is not easy to say. In the case of Yeats, there must be some kind of connection between his wayward, even tortured style of writing and his rather sinister vision of life. Mr Menon¹ is chiefly concerned with the esoteric philosophy underlying Yeats's work, but the quotations which are scattered all through his interesting book serve to remind one how artificial Yeats's manner of writing was. As a rule, this artificiality is accepted as Irishism, or Yeats is even credited with simplicity because he uses short words, but in fact one seldom comes on six consecutive lines of his verse in which there is not an archaism or an affected turn of speech. To take the nearest example:

Grant me an old man's Frenzy,
 My self must I remake
 Till I am Timon and Lear
 Or that William Blake
 Who beat upon the wall
 Till Truth obeyed his call.

The unnecessary "that" imports a feeling of affectation, and the same tendency is present in all but Yeats's best passages. One is seldom long away from a suspicion of "quaintness", something that links up not only with the 'nineties, the Ivory Tower and the "calf covers of pissed-on green", but also with Rackham's drawings, Liberty art-fabrics and the Peter Pan never-never land, of which, after all, The Happy Townland is merely a more appetising example. This does not matter, because, on the whole, Yeats gets away with it, and if his straining after effect is often irritating, it can also produce phrases ("the chill, footless years", "the mackerel-crowded seas") which suddenly overwhelm one like a girl's face seen across a room. He is an exception to the rule that poets do not use poetical language:

How many centuries spent
 The sedentary soul
 In toils of measurement
 Beyond eagle or mole,
 Beyond hearing or seeing,
 Or Archimedes' guess,
 To raise into being
 That loveliness?

Here he does not flinch from a squashy vulgar word like "loveliness" and after all it does not seriously spoil this wonderful passage. But the same tendencies, together with a sort of raggedness which is no doubt

intentional, weaken his epigrams and polemical poems. For instance (I am quoting from memory) the epigram against the critics who damned *The Playboy of the Western World*:

Once when midnight smote the air
Eunuchs ran through Hell and met
On every crowded street to stare
Upon great Juan riding by;
Even like these to rail and sweat,
Staring upon his sinewy thigh.

The power which Yeats has within himself gives him the analogy ready made and produces the tremendous scorn of the last line, but even in this short poem there are six or seven unnecessary words. It would probably have been deadlier if it had been neater.

Mr Menon's book is incidentally a short biography of Yeats, but he is above all interested in Yeats's philosophical "system", which in his opinion supplies the subject-matter of more of Yeats's poems than is generally recognised. This system is set forth fragmentarily in various places, and at full length in *A Vision*, a privately printed book which I have never read but which Mr Menon quotes from extensively. Yeats gave conflicting accounts of its origin, and Mr Menon hints pretty broadly that the "documents" on which it was ostensibly founded were imaginary. Yeats's philosophical system, says Mr Menon, "was at the back of his intellectual life almost from the beginning. His poetry is full of it. Without it his later poetry becomes almost completely unintelligible." As soon as we begin to read about the so-called system we are in the middle of a hocus-pocus of Great Wheels, gyres, cycles of the moon, reincarnation, disembodied spirits, astrology and what not. Yeats hedges as to the literalness with which he believed in all this, but he certainly

dabbled in spiritualism and astrology, and in earlier life had made experiments in alchemy. Although almost buried under explanations, very difficult to understand, about the phases of the moon, the central idea of his philosophical system seems to be our old friend, the cyclical universe, in which everything happens over and over again. One has not, perhaps, the right to laugh at Yeats for his mystical beliefs—for I believe it could be shown that some degree of belief in magic is almost universal—but neither ought one to write such things off as mere unimportant eccentricities. It is Mr Menon's perception of this that gives his book its deepest interest. "In the first flush of admiration and enthusiasm," he says, "most people dismissed the fantastical philosophy as the price we have to pay for a great and curious intellect. One did not quite realise where he was heading. And those who did, like Pound and perhaps Eliot, approved the stand that he finally took. The first reaction to this did not come, as one might have expected, from the politically-minded young English poets. They were puzzled because a less rigid or artificial system than that of *A Vision* might not have produced the great poetry of Yeats's last days." It might not, and yet Yeats's philosophy has some very sinister implications, as Mr Menon points out.

Translated into political terms, Yeats's tendency is Fascist. Throughout most of his life, and long before Fascism was ever heard of, he had had the outlook of those who reach Fascism by the aristocratic route. He is a great hater of democracy, of the modern world, science, machinery, the concept of progress—above all, of the idea of human equality. Much of the imagery of his work is feudal, and it is clear that he was not altogether free from ordinary snobbishness. Later these tendencies took clearer shape and led him to "the exultant acceptance of authoritarianism as the only solution. Even violence and tyranny are not necessarily evil because the people, knowing not evil and good, would

become perfectly acquiescent to tyranny. . . . Everything must come from the top. Nothing can come from the masses.” Not much interested in politics, and no doubt disgusted by his brief incursions into public life, Yeats nevertheless makes political pronouncements. He is too big a man to share the illusions of Liberalism, and as early as 1920 he foretells in a justly famous passage (“The Second Coming”) the kind of world that we have actually moved into. But he appears to welcome the coming age, which is to be “hierarchical, masculine, harsh, surgical”, and is influenced both by Ezra Pound and by various Italian Fascist writers. He describes the new civilisation which he hopes and believes will arrive: “an aristocratic civilisation in its most completed form, every detail of life hierarchical, every great man’s door crowded at dawn by petitioners, great wealth everywhere in a few men’s hands, all dependent upon a few, up to the Emperor himself, who is a God dependent on a greater God, and everywhere, in Court, in the family, an inequality made law.” The innocence of this statement is as interesting as its snobbishness. To begin with, in a single phrase, “great wealth in a few men’s hands”, Yeats lays bare the central reality of Fascism, which the whole of its propaganda is designed to cover up. The merely political Fascist claims always to be fighting for justice: Yeats, the poet, sees at a glance that Fascism means injustice, and acclaims it for that very reason. But at the same time he fails to see that the new authoritarian civilisation, if it arrives, will not be aristocratic, or what he means by aristocratic. It will not be ruled by noblemen with Van Dyck faces, but by anonymous millionaires, shiny-bottomed bureaucrats and murdering gangsters. Others who have made the same mistake have afterwards changed their views and one ought not to assume that Yeats, if he had lived longer, would necessarily have followed his friend Pound, even in sympathy. But the tendency of the passage I have quoted above is obvious, and its complete throwing

overboard of whatever good the past two thousand years have achieved is a disquieting symptom.

How do Yeats's political ideas link up with his leaning towards occultism? It is not clear at first glance why hatred of democracy and a tendency to believe in crystal-gazing should go together. Mr Menon only discusses this rather shortly, but it is possible to make two guesses. To begin with, the theory that civilisation moves in recurring cycles is one way out for people who hate the concept of human equality. If it is true that "all this", or something like it, "has happened before", then science and the modern world are debunked at one stroke and progress becomes for ever impossible. It does not much matter if the lower orders are getting above themselves, for, after all, we shall soon be returning to an age of tyranny. Yeats is by no means alone in this outlook. If the universe is moving round on a wheel, the future must be foreseeable, perhaps even in some detail. It is merely a question of discovering the laws of its motion, as the early astronomers discovered the solar year. Believe that, and it becomes difficult not to believe in astrology or some similar system. A year before the war, examining a copy of *Gringoire*, the French Fascist weekly, much read by army officers, I found in it no less than thirty-eight advertisements of clairvoyants. Secondly, the very concept of occultism carries with it the idea that knowledge must be a secret thing, limited to a small circle of initiates. But the same idea is integral to Fascism. Those who dread the prospect of universal suffrage, popular education, freedom of thought, emancipation of women, will start off with a predilection towards secret cults. There is another link between Fascism and magic in the profound hostility of both to the Christian ethical code.

No doubt Yeats wavered in his beliefs and held at different times many different opinions, some enlightened, some not. Mr Menon repeats for him Eliot's claim that he had the longest period of development of any

poet who has ever lived. But there is one thing that seems constant, at least in all of his work that I can remember, and that is his hatred of modern western civilisation and desire to return to the Bronze Age, or perhaps to the Middle Ages. Like all such thinkers, he tends to write in praise of ignorance. The Fool in his remarkable play, *The Hour-Glass*, is a Chestertonian figure, “God’s fool”, the “natural born innocent”, who is always wiser than the wise man. The philosopher in the play dies on the knowledge that all his lifetime of thought has been wasted (I am quoting from memory again):

The stream of the world has changed its course,
 And with the stream my thoughts have run
 Into some cloudly, thunderous spring
 That is its mountain-source;
 Ay, to a frenzy of the mind,
 That all that we have done’s undone
 Our speculation but as the wind.

Beautiful words, but by implication profoundly obscurantist and reactionary; for if it is really true that a village idiot, as such, is wiser than a philosopher, then it would be better if the alphabet had never been invented. Of course, all praise of the past is partly sentimental, because we do not live in the past. The poor do not praise poverty. Before you can despise the machine, the machine must set you free from brute labour. But that is not to say that Yeats’s yearning for a more primitive and more hierarchical age was not sincere. How much of all this is traceable to mere snobbishness, product of Yeats’s own position as an impoverished offshoot of the aristocracy, is a different question. And the connection between his obscurantist opinions and his tendency towards “quaintness” of language remains to be worked out; Mr Menon hardly touches upon it.

This is a very short book, and I would greatly like to see Mr Menon go ahead and write another book on Yeats, starting where this one leaves off. “If the greatest poet of our times is exultantly ringing in an era of Fascism, it seems a somewhat disturbing symptom,” he says on the last page, and leaves it at that. It is a disturbing symptom, because it is not an isolated one. By and large the best writers of our time have been reactionary in tendency, and though Fascism does not offer any real return to the past, those who yearn for the past will accept Fascism sooner than its probable alternatives. But there are other lines of approach, as we have seen during the past two or three years. The relationship between Fascism and the literary intelligentsia badly needs investigating, and Yeats might well be the starting-point. He is best studied by someone like Mr Menon, who can approach a poet primarily as a poet, but who also knows that a writer’s political and religious beliefs are not excrescences to be laughed away, but something that will leave their mark even on the smallest detail of his work.¹¹

1.3 Symbolism in Yeats’s Poetry

Yeats’ poetry is replete with symbols. He has been called “the chief representative” of the Symbolist Movement in English literature. Indeed Yeats uses innumerable symbols and sometimes he uses the same symbol for different purposes in different context. Often he coins symbols from his study of the occult, Irish folklore and mythology, magic, philosophy, metaphysical, paintings and drawings which are generally unfamiliar to the readers.

¹¹ <http://www.telelib.com/authors/O/OrwellGeorge/essay/CriticalEssays/yeats.html>

It is true that French Symbolist Movement has a great impact on Yeats. But despite this fact, Yeats' use of symbols differs from that of them, in several ways.

Yeats makes use of a complex system of symbols in his poems. In Yeats' own words "a symbol is indeed, the possible expression of some invisible essence.....". Yeats' symbols are not merely denotative, but also connotative and evocative. In Yeats' poetry generally symbols are of two kinds; the traditional and the personal as his repeated symbol of "Rose". It is both a traditional as well as a personal symbol. Yeats' symbols are also all pervasive key-symbol. A key-symbol sheds light on the previous poems and illuminates their sense. "Rose", "Swan", and "Helen" are key-symbols.

The 'rose' in Yeats' poem is generally used to mean earthly love but in "The Rose of the World" it also symbolizes eternal love and beauty. In "The Rose of Battle" the rose is a refuge from earthly love. The symbol, thus, becomes complex and has to be read carefully in the context in which it is used.

The symbol of 'dance' is closely related to Yeats' "system" and is often employed in his poetry. It gives the meanings on the one hand, of a patterned movement, joyous energy and on the other hand, at times, a kind of unity. The symbol of dance evokes the concept of unity in "Among School Children".

O body swayed to music, O brightened glance,
How can we know the dancer from the dance?

Hence, the ideal state of balance and unity is associated with the symbols of dance.

'Byzantium' represents perfection and unity in Yeats' poems. He feels that Byzantium symbolizes perfection, which the world has never known before. He believes that in Byzantium, all spheres of life are

united; there is no fragmentation (Anarchy). In “Sailing to Byzantium” Byzantium becomes the symbol of perfection, free from the cycle of birth and death and also free from time because it is a world of art and an ideal existence, where is neither death nor decay.

The symbol of ‘bird’ is one of the most important symbols in Yeats’ poems. It is a striking example of the dynamic nature of the Yeatsian symbol, which grows, changes and acquires greater depth and destiny in their progression. The symbol of ‘Falcon’ is also very important. In “The Second Coming” Yeats says that modern world is disintegrating and leading to chaos.

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer.

A similar process may be traced in the ‘beast imagery’. The sphinx “a shape with lion body and the head of a man”, in “The second Coming” represents the end of the Christianity. Yeats’ uses this symbol with reference to his occult system.

In “The Tower” Tower is both a traditional and a personal symbol. It is used to suggest loneliness, national heritage and blood thirstiness. In another poem, “A prayer for my Daughter”, the tower suggest Yeats’ vision of the dark future of humanity.

Yeats is disgusted with old age, for this he uses the symbol of ‘Scarecrow’. He shows his disgust with old age in “Among School Children” saying:

Old clothes upon old sticks to scare a bird

There are a lot of other symbols in Yeats’ poetry. So, to sum up, we can say that Yeats’ use of symbol is complex and rich. Symbols, indeed, give “Dump things Voices, and Bodiless things Bodies” in Yeats’ poetry. The ‘rose’, the ‘swan’, the ‘tower’, the ‘winding stairs’ and the ‘spinning

tops' – all assume a life of their own and speak to the reader of different things.

William Butler Yeats used symbols prominently in his poetry. This stemmed in part from the influence of William Blake, whom Yeats admired and studied and who had developed an extensive system of symbols himself. Yeats was no mere imitator, however. He used symbols toward incredibly ambitious ends: to reconcile binaries in pursuit of a unity of being.

Rose

Yeats wrote a series of rose poems, including “To the Rose Upon the Rood of Time,” “The Secret Rose,” “The Rose Tree” and “The Rose of the World.” For Yeats, the flower reconciles the binary of temporal and eternal. It unifies these concepts in two ways. First, the rose maintains its position as a representative or touchstone of beauty unwaveringly. In other words, roses never go out of fashion. However, an actual individual rose lives quite a short life. Similarly, the rose symbolizes woman, both divine, transcendent woman and natural, sensual woman, and in doing so, unifies them.

Stone

Unlike the rose, the stone symbol does not unify opposed concepts. The stone's dualism comes from the fact that the qualities it represents -- solidity, steadiness -- may be positive or negative. The stone's immovability may indicate strength or stubbornness. As a result, stones often figure in poems in which Yeats grapples with his ambivalence about Ireland's political climate. In “Easter 1916,” Yeats describes a stone in a rapidly flowing river. In the image, the stone participates in a dualism; while the stone never moves, the water never rests. The stone never bends; the water constantly changes shape to flow around any obstacles.

Gyre

Yeats imagined time not as a line, but as a spiral. In some poems the spiral appears as a winding staircase, but the poet's favorite image was a gyre. Gyres are sewing tools that have inverted conical shapes, like that of a tornado. As a symbol, the gyre characterizes history as both progressive and repetitive. Yeats' most famous reference to the gyre occurs in "The Second Coming": "Turning and turning in the widening gyre / The falcon cannot hear the falconer." In this poem, the disintegration of the gyre signals the end of time.

Water

Water's significance differs between poems. Yeats sometimes uses it to represent another world and devotes his attention to species that are able to move in and out of water: dolphins, which breathe air, and swans that both fly and swim. Yeats places this movement between water and air parallel to movement between life and death. In both "The Wild Swans at Coole" and "Byzantium," the speaker is a tired, aged man who is in awe of the immortality of the water-dwelling creatures. While Coole Park is an actual place, the sea beside Byzantium is imagined by Yeats, and the two poems' symbols differ accordingly. The swans, gliding on actual waters, represent the eternity of nature. The dolphins, swimming in an imagined sea, allude to the Roman myth that dolphins carried souls to the afterlife.¹²

Some significant images and symbols such as Irish heroic figures, Celtic and Christian symbols, and many more are found in William Butler Yeats's poems. Heroic images in Yeats's poems are perceived as a vehicle for protesting against the religion, social structure, political principles and cultural standards of modern Ireland. The definition of a hero is: one who possesses authority over the average, who is admired by others for his or her noble quality or courage.

¹² <http://classroom.synonym.com/symbolism-yeats-poems-2926.html>

Heroes are morally worthy men or women who have the courage to protest against the unfairness of society and rebel against occupation, just like Yeats's discontent with the modern Ireland and Britain's occupation of Ireland, its industrialization, secularism and so on. He obviously longed for a simpler and more primitive world (like India). According to "Yeats and the Heroic Ideal", there are many possible kinds of hero—the historical hero, literary hero, mythological hero, epic hero and others. The mythological hero is considered as possessing the supernatural power while the epic hero is more clearly human and pursues worldly glory and success.

Perhaps the heroic figures in Yeats's poems are more mythological heroes and historical heroes such as Cuchulain the paramount hero of Irish mythology, Edward Fitzgerald the Irish patriot fatally wounded while resisting arrest, Wolfe Tone, leader of the United Irishmen who committed suicide after his capture by British forces and many more. Other than those real or unreal heroic figures, many of the great people who were really existed such as Pythagoras the Greek philosopher and mathematician, Empedocles the Greek philosopher, Callimachus the Greek sculptor and others also appear in Yeats's poem.

The usage of lots of historical and mythical figures in his poems requires the readers to have such kinds of knowledge about those figures otherwise it is difficult to comprehend or obtain clear images of those poems. Repetition of the same words is also frequently found in Yeats's poems; perhaps it is due to his aim of creating a kind of atmosphere as a means of emphasizing his thoughts and also to create the harmony of rhythm in his works¹³.

When the world is getting more civilized, it is inevitable that the lost heroes are being forgotten. Yeats's "September 1913" is like a picture of

¹³ <http://home.att.net/~wegast/symbols/symbols.htm>

a broken society that has entirely forgotten the heroic individual, he seemed to be reeducating the world in the appreciation of the heroic individual, and aimed to revitalize the Irish culture as it had been in former times.

Many of Yeats's poems are also connected with long dead civilizations like ancient Greece and Celtic Ireland. Those ideal cultures in Yeats's eyes had vanished together with the flowing of time and been buried in history, and he was eager to find a suitable culture to replace the present modern Irish culture that he treated as his enemy. When he couldn't discover the ideal one in Ireland and Europe itself, it was natural that he tried to search for it somewhere else. And he seemed to have found it in the Eastern world, India, the country that possesses a long history and is full of mysterious aspects in Europeans' eyes.

Due to the fact that India and Ireland were also occupied by Britain, perhaps Yeats found a kind of brotherly feeling towards India. India is a simpler and more primitive world that he was longing for. Perhaps he was also dissatisfied with the usage of the English language that was replacing the original Indian and Irish languages. Therefore he encouraged writers to write in their own original languages instead of English in order to protect the primitivism or the originality of the country. Other than India, Yeats was interested in one of the countries in the oriental world—Japan. But perhaps it was because there are more similarities between India and Ireland in terms of being occupied by Britain, that he seemed to have more interest in India compared to Japan¹⁴.

As in his famous poem "The Secret Rose", the combination of Christian and Celtic elements together with myth and tradition, and as the title of this poem --the word "rose" itself is often used by poets to symbolize Ireland in which it is a "recurrent symbol in Irish poetry and in

¹⁴ Zwerdling, Alex. *Yeats and the Heroic Ideal*, New York University Press, 1965.

religious and mystical iconography”. According to “Symbols in Christian Art and Architecture”, the image of the rose is “usually shown in stylized form, has been a common Christian symbol since the 1200s. It may be used to represent the Messianic promise, the nativity of Christ, the virgin Mary (her rose is white for purity), or martyrdom (a red rose). It is used often in Gothic architecture.” Even though in this poem Yeats didn’t mention any colour of the rose, the phrase “inviolable Rose” perhaps suggests that Ireland should be pure from earthly violation, as pure as the virgin Mary, and keep all those elements of impurity such as those mentioned above that he disagreed with away from Ireland.

How desperately Yeats wanted to revitalize the old Irish identity and culture but unfortunately the modern and industrialized Ireland failed him. When a country is moving towards a new era and experiencing revolution, it is inevitable that new concepts such as materialism and modernization will take over the old systems. Just like what he mentioned in “September 1913”: “Romantic Ireland’s dead and gone, it’s with O’Leary in the grave.”¹⁵ No matter how desperately he wanted to preserve the old culture, he is ultimately defeated by the flowing of time.

His poem entitled “He wishes for the Cloths of Heaven” sounds: “...I would spread the cloths under your feet: but I, being poor, have only my dreams; I have spread my dreams under your feet; tread softly because you tread on my dreams.” His aim of revitalizing the old era and its culture is unfortunately like the word in this poem—dream, in which it is as if his dream of preserving the good old qualities of society is being trodden on by the evil elements of the modern Ireland but he could do nothing about it at all¹⁶.

¹⁵ Yeats, W.B., W.B. Yeats, ed. John Kelly, Everyman J.M. Dent, London, 1997.

¹⁶ Zwerdling, Alex. Yeats and the Heroic Ideal, New York University Press, 1965.

Chapter II. Celtic Mythology in William Butler Yeats Poetry

2.1 Revival of Celtic and Irish Folklore in Yeats's Poetry

Because Irish myth and folklore had been suppressed by church doctrine and British control of school system, W.B. Yeats used his poetry as a tool for re-educating the Irish population about their heritage and as a strategy for developing Irish nationalism. Thus the participation of Yeats in the Irish political system had its origins in his interest in Irish myth and folklore. Yeats retold entire folktales in epic poems and plays and used fragments of stories in shorter poems. Moreover, he presented poems which deal with subjects, images, and themes called from folklore. Most important, Yeats infused his poetry with a rich sense of Irish culture. Even poems that do not deal explicitly with subjects from myth retain powerful tinges of indigenous Irish culture. Yeats often borrowed word selection, verse form, and patterns of imagery directly from traditional Irish myth and folklore.

At the time when William Butler Yeats began writing, the Celtic aspect of Irishness was of prime importance. This becomes clear in the titles of Yeats's earliest works, where Celtism and folklore are foregrounded. In 1888 he published *Fairy and Folk Tales*; in 1889, his first book of poems, *The Wanderings of Oisín, and other Poems* was published; in 1892 *The Countess Kathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics* was published while 1893 saw the publication of *The Celtic Twilight*. In all of these works, Yeats was attempting to express some sense of Irishness which would allow him to participate fully in the Irish literary and cultural revival. The image of a garment being woven to keep warm is an emblematic one, which in many ways describes more about Yeats's relationship with the Irish-Ireland, Irish literary revivalist, and

Irish nationalist streams then would first appear obvious. In a letter to the Editor of *United Ireland*, on December 17th, 1892, Yeats made his position quite clear. Referring to Hyde's lecture on the deanglicization of Ireland, he notes that Hyde's fears for the future of the Irish language seem to him to be well grounded: 'I fear he spoke the truth, and that the Gaelic language will soon be no more heard'¹⁷. In this context, Yeats had his own points to make with respect to this whole notion of Irishness, points which, while on the surface seem to agree with Hyde, in actuality deconstruct Hyde's basic premise regarding the centrality of the Irish language. In fact, he deconstructs the essentialist premise of Hyde's writing while purporting to espouse his project of deanglicization. Yeats asks:

*Is there, then, no hope for the de-Anglicising of our people? Can we not build up a national tradition, a national literature, which shall be none the less Irish in spirit from being English in language? Can we not keep the continuity of the nation's life, not by trying to do what Dr. Hyde has practically pronounced impossible, but by translating and retelling in English, which shall have an indefinable Irish quality of rhythm and style, all that is best in the ancient literature? Can we not write and persuade others to write histories and romances of the great Gaelic men of the past, from the son of Nessa to Owen Roe, until there has been made a golden bridge between the old and the new?*¹⁸

Here, Yeats is offering to deanglicize Ireland by writing about Irish themes in English. The subtlety of his thought and mode of expression allows him to seemingly validate Hyde's objectives while at the same time advocating a mode of their achievement which must, of necessity, completely transform those objectives. Yeats, in fact, is actually changing

¹⁷ Yeats, W. B. (1966) *The Variorum Edition of the Plays of W. B. Yeats*. London: Macmillan.

¹⁸ (Yeats; 1970: 255)2

the terms of Hyde's definition of deanglicization. He is inserting a subtle deconstructive lever into Hyde's essentialist position; he differentiates between the English language as colonial vehicle, and an English language which has an 'indefinable Irish quality of rhythm and style.' This attitude has the advantage of moving in a parallel vector with the Irish-Irelanders and the Gaelic revival. Yeats, in his hope of creating a 'golden bridge between the old and the new', was still paying homage to the past as centre, but was also, as Pearse had realized, already engaged in a process which would culminate in the redefining of that centre as a logocentric *primum mobile* of Irish identity. In other words, this golden bridge would carry two-way traffic, not only from past to present, but also from present to past in a process which would reinvent that past. What Yeats was attempting was a form of ideological critique, as he located himself within the revival movement, while at the same time through translation, bringing about a negative dialectical transformation of the ideology of that movement. Having grasped that identity is 'the primal form of ideology'¹⁹, he set about redefining that same ideology of identification so as to quarry out a place for himself and his own perspective, which Foster describes as a 'more nuanced, ambiguous kind of Irishness'. Crucially, he was not simply invoking the past, but rather transactionally reinventing that past in the light of his own 'ambiguous' sense of Irishness. There is clear precedent for a Yeatsian involvement in the invention of a tradition (something 'which came easily to WBY'), in his association with MacGregor Mathers who invented a 'creationmyth' for the Order of the Golden Dawn.

The two proper names in this quotation are also worthy of note: the 'son of Nessa' refers to Conchubar Mac Nessa, mythical king of Ulster during the Red Branch cycle of heroic tales, involving Cuchulain, a figure

¹⁹ Foster, R. Fitzroy. *W. B. Yeats a Life: The Apprentice Mage*. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1998. Print.

of Celtic and Irish pre-history. ‘Owen Roe’ refers to Owen Roe O’Neill, an historical figure who led the army of Ulster in the various civil wars in Ireland from 1641 to 1652. The seamless motion from myth to history elides a seminal issue underpinning Yeats’s desire to write about mythical figures at the expense of historical ones. It also imbricates Yeats in a negative dialectical definition of Irishness, in that he is adducing a tradition which does not actually exist in the form or medium which he is utilizing. Much of the writings about these heroic figures are in the Irish language; by translating them into English, he is pointing the definitional vector of Irish identity in a new, and at that time, non-existent direction. By invoking these characters in the English language, Yeats is offering a way out of the closed system of essentialist Irishness, and closed systems, as Adorno has observed, are ‘bound to be finished. Also, in this way the *autos*, is achieved by giving notions of Irishness a ‘turn towards non-identity’ a process which is the ‘hinge of negative dialectics’.

Yeats’s aim was to write about the ‘matter of Ireland’, but in the English language, given his own inability to learn Irish to any reasonable standard. While this lack of knowledge was a factor in his desire to create an Irish identity in the English language, there can be little doubt that he also had an epistemological and ethical incentive. By so doing, he would radically transform the ‘matter of Ireland’. His own historical tradition of Anglo-Irishness would have been English speaking, but he, and his sisters, saw this as no reason as to why they should not be deemed ‘Irish’. He puts the situation succinctly in a typical Yeatsian epigraph: ‘Gaelic is my national language but it is not my mother tongue’²⁰. To write in the Irish language would be to admit that historically, his tradition and religion were not ‘Irish’, and thus, he would be taking up that very

²⁰ Yeats, W. B. (1961) *Essays and Introductions*. London: Macmillan.

position suggested by D. P. Moran who saw the sympathetic Palesman as standing behind the Gael, waiting to be ‘absorbed’.

Yeats, as indicated obliquely in his letter, decided to avoid the binary oppositional designations of ‘Palesman-Gael’ and instead to move into prehistory, to a time when all Irish people were united by a common religion and a common language. He decided to write about Celtic legends from the past, seeing them as examples of an ‘ur-Irishness’ which would serve as a unifying banner under which all strands of contemporary Irishness could unite; here was a place which was not a place, a non-lieu, wherein the difficulties of sameness and otherness could be elided. As John P. Frayne, the editor of Yeats’s *Uncollected Prose* has pointed out, although he ‘repeatedly attempted Gaelic, he could not have read those tales in their original form’, and was forced to rely on translations. Of course these translations transformed the centralities of Irish-Ireland by reinserting them into a new language, the language of the other, and this process of translation would radically alter the selfhood of Irishness that was contained in these texts. In Derridean terms, the ‘essences’ of Irishness were always-already in the process of dissemination through the hauntological processes of the language of the other which deconstructed their logocentric core.

Ironically, the very existence of these translations bespoke a cultural unity of interest that was far in advance of any political unity that had ever existed in Ireland. Many of the writers who first translated the Celtic legends of Fionn, Cuchulain, and Oisín were Protestant Anglo-Irish scholars and writers, such as Sylvester O’Halloran, a seminal figure in the founding of the Royal Irish Academy in 1785; Charlotte Brooke whose *Reliques of Irish Poetry* was published in 1789; Joseph Cooper Walker; Sir Samuel Ferguson, and Standish O’Grady. Many of the societies for the study of Irish had been founded by Protestant scholars and antiquarians,

interested in the language: the Gaelic Society of Dublin, 1806; the Ibero-Celtic Society, 1818; the Celtic Society, 1843; the Ossianic Society, 1853; while in 1833, the Dublin University Magazine, was founded, which would educate Irish people in literary taste (Boyce: 1995; 229). Hence, the existence of these translations pointed towards a form of cultural Irishness in which all Irish people could participate.

Generally, Yeats's espousals of nationalism and patriotism were some way removed from green Irish-Ireland essentialism. For example, in his October 1886 attack on Edward Dowden, about his review of Sir Samuel Ferguson's poetry, he was well aware that Ferguson was 'nationalist only in his use of Irish subject matter, and in politics was a unionist'²¹. In using these legends Yeats, as he wrote to Katharine Tynan, was attempting to 'search them for new methods of expressing ourselves'. The personal pronoun here is crucial, especially in the light of the Protestant derivation of the translations of the legends; by translating these legends into English, and by his subsequent use of these translations, Yeats was inscribing his own tradition and his own language into the culture of Irishness, and by so doing, was redefining that Irishness. By espousing the cause of Ferguson as an example, he was making the point that nationalism and unionism were not incompatible, nor should the definitions of Irishness be ever so enunciated as to make them seem so.

By delving into Celtic pre-history, the political and historical divisions that had come to define the Irish situation could be elided and annealed into a mythic and heroic cultural archive which would allow Irish people to take pride in their own culture. By availing of translations to achieve this, he was redefining the core of Irish identity by opening a

²¹ Hirsch, Edward. "A War Between the Orders: Yeats's Fiction and the Transcendental moment." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 17.1 (1983): 52-66. JSTOR. Web. 12 Oct. 2011

place at its centre, and in the process, transforming that centre into a Zentrum, which could be influenced by the Protestant tradition which had brought into being the very study of the Irish language, both in the original and in translation. He paid indirect homage to Sylvester O'Halloran, in *A General Introduction For My Work*, when he noted that a generation before *The Nation* newspaper was founded, 'the Royal Irish Academy had begun the study of ancient Irish literature.' He went on to explicitly make the point that this study was as 'much a gift from the Protestant aristocracy which had created the Parliament as *The Nation* and its school' Hence, his use of translations, which while on the one hand seem consonant with the ideology of the nationalism and Gaelicism of Irish-Ireland, in actuality undermine its monological centralisms by this incorporation of the Protestant scholarly Gaelic tradition, and the language of alterity.

Through this method of writing, he hoped both to participate in the creation of a central core of Irishness, from a cultural perspective, thus keeping in touch with the Gaelic revivals and with nationalist Ireland, while at the same time redefining this centre through the circumferential activity of translation. This process has been seen by Peggy Kamuf as displaying the movement of the 'trans – translation, transference, transport, transformation – as the very movement of thought between points of origin and arrival that are always being deferred, differed one by the other'. Hence, the very process of translation becomes an ethical act as it destabilizes the essentialist concept of selfhood that was underwriting the Irish-Ireland outlook, and instead introduces a role for alterity.

2.2 Celtic Traditional Subject Matters in Yeats's Poems

Often, the poetry and plays of W.B. Yeats take its subject matter from traditional Celtic folklore and myth. Myths are reflections of profound reality and they, dramatically, represent our instinctive understanding. Moreover, myths are collective to and communal, and they had sense of wholeness and togetherness to social life.²² Yeats endeavored by incorporating into his work the stories and characters of Celtic origin, to encapsulate something of the national character of his beloved Ireland. The authors' own sense of nationalism as well as the overriding personal interest in mythology and the oral traditions and folklore were the reasons and motivations his use of Celtic themes. Books with titles such as "Ancient Legends", "Mystic Charms and Superstitions of Ireland", "The Fireside Stories of Ireland", "History of Ireland", "Cuculain and the Contemporaries", "Irish Folklore" and many others were of great help to the young Yeats.²³ He asserted, by 1889, that "[I had] worked my way through most, if not all, recorded Irish folktales"²⁴. By this time, he had written an introduction for and edited, *Irish Fairy and Folk Tales*. By immersing himself in the rich and varied world of Celtic myth and folklore, Yeats would contribute to this literary world of poems and plays that embrace his native legends while promoting his own sense of nationalism.

2.2.1 Irish Nationalism in "The Song of Wandering Aengus"

"The Song of Wandering Aengus" is a poem that shows how Yeats melds folklore and nationalism. In this poem, he refers to Aengus, the

²² Joseph Campbell Foundation. [http:// www.Jef.org](http://www.Jef.org).

²³ Frank Kinahan, *Yeats, Folklore, and Occultism: Early work and Thought* (Boston: University of Hymann, 1988),

²⁴ Same source

Irish god of love. He is a young, handsome god that had four birds flying about his head. The birds symbolized kisses and inspired love in all who heard them sing. Part of the story is that, at one point, Aengus was troubled by the dream of a young maiden. A woman that is everything his heart desires and he quickly falls in love with her and becomes love sick upon waking. Then, he began searching all of Ireland for the young woman in his dreams. Also, he tells his mother and she searches the whole of Ireland for the maiden, but after a year, she still had not found the woman. Then Aengus called his father in to help search for the woman. After a year of searching, his father could not find her. Finally, a king and a friend of Aengus's father was called to search for her. After a year, he found the elusive young maiden.

In this poem, Yeats strays from the actual myth of Aengus. He wrote:

Though I am old with wandering

Through hollow lands and hilly lands."²⁵

In the original myth Yeats was still young when he found his love. The poem was about longing and searching, rather than about a subject of song of found love. The subject matter of the poem alone helps illustrate Yeats's profound sense of nationalism. Yeats's choice of Celtic god over the more traditional use of Greek or Roman gods in poetry was to elevate Irish mythology in the world of literature.

Many of Yeats's early works share the common theme of Celtic folklore and myth. As the poet continued in this manner, it becomes clear to the reader that the thematic elements of the work become most focused. Then the poet moved towards a distinctly Irish sensibility with regard to love of country and this can be seen in his work. In "To Ireland in the Coming Times" Yeats again draws upon Irish folklore and mythic

²⁵ "The Song of Wandering Aengus" W.B. Yeats 1899, *The Wind Among The Reeds*

symbols and sets them against a backdrop of national identity. When Yeats writes:

*"When Time began to rant and rage
The measure of her flying feet
Made Irelands' heart began to beat;"*²⁶

he is speaking of the affects of the industrial revolution, "When Time began to rant and rage."²⁷ How the pre-industrial rhythm of life had been interrupted by the hourly wage in the cities, as opposed to the pastoral life of the country that was governed by the changing of the seasons, rather than the movement of the hands of a clock.

This accelerated pace of life and of time, "The measure of her flying feet,"²⁸ was reviled by Yeats and he wrote of his distaste of current English life, referring to passions that a man might yet find in Ireland, "Love of the unseen life and love of the country."²⁹ The incompatible pace of modern life in England did not connect with Irish patterns of living and so, "Made Irelands' heart began to beat;" here Yeats is writing of the awaking of an Irish literary tradition. This sentiment is touched upon again farther along the poem, though this time Yeats brings Celtic imagery into it, Yet he who treads in measured ways

*May surely barter gaze for gaze
Man ever journeys on with them
After the red-rose-bordered hem
Ah, faeries, dancing under the moon,
A Druid land, a Druid tune!*³⁰

²⁶ "To Ireland In The Coming Times", W.B.Yeats.

²⁷ Same source

²⁸ Same source

²⁹ Robin Skelton and Ann Saddle Myer, *The World of W.B. Yeats* (Seattle: University of Washington press, 1965), P.6.

³⁰ "To Ireland in The Coming Times", W.B.Yeats.

These lines restate the "measured" way of life in England, its obsession with commerce, "barter gaze for gaze" and how the English way of life has spread beyond its borders, "Man journeys on with them". Yeats then emphasizes Irish imagery; the rose, the aeries and the Druid that are all closely associated with Ireland and are used here to disparage the rigid and structure English world view.

In order to create a conspicuously Irish literature, Yeats will take inspiration from the myths and legends of ancient Ireland. Cuchulain, as a character, appears many times throughout Yeats's work, this legend predated back to the arrival of Christianity to the Island. Cuchulain is a character that appears in the Ulster Cycle of stories and he, much like Hercules or Achilles of the Greeks, was a superhuman warrior. Cuchulains' birth was considered divine in origin, having supernatural fatherfigures, such as: Conall, Cernach and Fergus who raised him intermittently as did the king of Ulster, Conchobars'. As a youth, he defeated one hundred and fifty of king Conchobars' troops on his way to the royal court. Arriving at the royal court of king Conchobar, the young Cuchulain demands weaponry and then proceeds to break fifteen sets of weapons given to him. Special magically strengthened arms had to be made withstand Cuchulains' godlike might. His prowess on the field of battle is legendary and is said to have overcome an entire army sent to dispose him by entering into a supernatural berserk frenzy or 'warp spasm'. When frenzied, Cuchulain cannot make a distinction between friend and foe and some of his allies are victims of his battle madness.³¹

Most important to Yeats' work is the relationship between Conchobar and Cuchlain. According to the legend, Cuchulain swears an oath of the loyalty to the king, and the king then sets Cuchulain against his own son, Conla, believing him to be a threat to the kingdom. Cuchulain kills his

³¹ Miranda Green, Dictionary of Celtic Myth and Legends (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1992), Pp., 70-74.

son in combat because he is bound by his allegiance to the king. After the tragic deed is done, Cuchulain, mad with grief, rushes into the ocean and begins to slash at the waves with his sword. Yeats's "Cuchlain Fight with the Sea" describes this in verse,

Cuchulain stirred,
Stared on the horses of the sea, and heard
The cars of battle and his and own name cried,
*And fought with the invulnerable tide.*³²

An ironic tone is felt here, considering the hero as virtually invulnerable. This story is also told in the form of the play, "On Bails' Strand" which was performed by the players of the Abbey Theater.

2.2.2 "The Cycle of Ulster"

The Cycle of Ulster, a collection of myths that recounts the conflict between Conchobar of Ulster and Medb of Connacht, has Cuchulain fighting on the side of Ulster, for king Conchobar. The armies of Ulster are weakened by a curse put upon them by Macha, a goddess with three aspects. As a woman, Macha, was forced to compete in a footrace against horses, even though pregnant at the time. She wins the race, promptly gives birth to twins and before passing away places a curse upon the men of Ulster that they will be weak in the times of greatest danger. All are weakened except for Cuchulain, who fights the forces of Connacht single-handedly.³³

The demise of the hero is foreshadowed by a series of events that are magically forbidden for the hero to engage in. Because of circumstances, the hero is forced to break this magic code of behavior, one after another,

³² Famous Poems by Famous Poets "Cuchulain's Fight with The Sea" By W.B.Yeats, metrist Online.

³³ Proinsias Mac Cama, Celtic Mythology (New York: Peter Bedrock Books, 1968), p.97.

until it weakens him, making him vulnerable. Eventually Medb through treachery, sorcery and the entirety of every armed man in Ireland is able to lure Cuchulain to his death by a spear forged by Vulcan himself.

Mortally wounded, he bids himself to a pillar stone with cloth so that he may die on his feet. It is only after Morrigh had the shapeshifting war goddess, and her sisters appear as crows and perch upon Cuchulains' shoulder that any of the combatants dare approach the dying hero to finish him off.³⁴ There are many other stories that recount the deeds of this Irish hero. It is sufficient to say that Cuchulain is the hero most identified with Ireland and represents both positive and negative aspects of the Irish people and their struggle.

Much later in his career, Yeats would revisit the folkloric themes that were so pervasive in his early work with the poem "Cuchulain Comforted". In this poem, the poet describes the death of the Irish hero: "He leant upon a tree /As though to meditate on wounds and blood."³⁵ Here the tree has replaced the pillar stone of the myth. The author then writes:

*"A shroud that seemed to have authority
Among those bird-like things came, and let fall
A bundle of linen. Shrouds by two and three".³⁶*

The burial garment is appropriate to the scene of a dying man, but a "shroud that seemed to have authority" seems to be imposing its will upon the fallen hero. If Cuchulain represents Ireland in this poem, then the bearer of the shroud (morrighan in legend) or the shroud itself might be indicative of malevolent forces within Ireland that prevent progress and put heroic ideals to death. Often, in Irish history, have those who fought an independent free Ireland been undone, not by the English, but by a

³⁴ Same source

³⁵ Famous Poems by Famous Poets "Cuchulain Comforted", W.B.Yeats, metrist Online.

³⁶ Same source

lack of solidarity from within. Yeats once said of Celtic plays, "They would be far more effective than lectures and might do more than anything else we can do to make the Irish, Scottish, and often other Celts recognize their solidarity."³⁷ The verse in "Cuchulain Comforted", continues:

'Now must we sing and sing the best we can,
 But first you must be told our character;
 Convicted cowards all, by kindred slain
 'Or driven from home and left to die in fear.'
 They sang, but had nor human tunes nor words,
 Though all was done in common as before,'
 They had changed their throat of birds.³⁸

Yeats will often make reference to song in his writing, and often had singing in his plays. This recurrent motif in his work is related to folklore in the sense that folklore is an oral tradition passed down through the generations. Yeats, when speaking of difference between Irish and English literature had this to say, "Irish poetry and Irish stories were made to be spoken or sung, while English literature has all but completely shaped itself in the printing press."³⁹ When the poet writes:

"Though all was done in common as before,

They had changed their throats and had the throats of birds;" this line speaks to the oral tradition of folklore.

In the retelling of the same stories overtime, certain parts of the mythical story is altered depending upon the teller, though the overall structure of the story would remain. Yeats recognizes this and spoke of Irish legend as "...ever changing ever the same".⁴⁰

³⁷ Robin Skelton and Ann Saddle Myer, P.77.

³⁸ Famous Poems by Famous Poets "Cuchulain Comforted" By W.B.Yeats, metrist Online.

³⁹ Mary Helen Thuente, W.B.Yeats and Irish Folklore (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd, 1980), P.243.

⁴⁰ Mary Helen Thuente, W.B.Yeats and Irish Folklore (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd, 1980), P.243.

Stories and characters from The Ulster Cycle also appear in the dramatic plays of Yeats and here the intention of the artist in producing Celtic work is abundantly clear. It is well known that the foundation of The Abbey Theatre where the work was performed, were built upon the belief that a Great Irish would have the power to move Irish audiences because what was playing out upon the stage would resonate with their heritage and they would be more inclined to be identified with the characters and stories. Yeats states that, "One should love best what is nearest and most interwoven with one's life"⁴¹. Further, Yeats then remarked, "One wants to write for one's own people, who come to the playhouse with knowledge of one's subjects and with hearts ready to be moved."⁴² By applying a new approach to an old form, Yeats' innovation was his use of the mythic stories and characters from Ireland's past and presenting them on stage.

Yeats presented plays that relied heavily upon the myth and legends of ancient Ireland, among them; "On Baile's Strand", "Deirde", and "The Death of Cuchulain". Though Yeats' plays deviate from the source material throughout, the core of the plays remain true to their origins. One reason for Yeats' invoking an artist's license with certain scenes is that there are practical limitations with what can be done on stage. Another reason for Yeats' re-imagining these myths is that it would often serve to enhance the dramatic effect of the story. For example, in the play "Deirde" the queen commits suicide at the end of the play by using a knife that she has secreted away. In the myth it is told that Deirde stays with King Conchobar, the man who slew her lover, for an entire year before committing suicide by flying herself from a moving chariot, shattering

⁴¹ Matthew Bell, "Yeats, Nationalism, and Myth". Internet Source.

⁴² Same source

her head against stone.⁴³ It is clear why Yeats chose one over the other, for as dramatic as Deirde's death is in the myth, on stage it would not have played as well. What Yeats did preserve, however, are the characters' motivations and relationships that drive the narrative forward and create a sense of drama and often, tragedy. Yeats would say: "All folk literature has indeed a passion whose like is not in modern literature and music and art, except where it has come by straight or crooked way out of ancient times."⁴⁴

The folklore, myth and legends of ancient Celtic traditions gave Yeats a rich well of inspiration to draw from. By not falling into the drip of overly romanticizing his work, as many other authors of the time would do, Yeats was able to help begin a tradition of another sort, the Irish literary tradition. By placing importance on the Irish culture in his work, Yeats fulfilled his own sense of national pride to the delight of his readers and audiences and to challenge many of his English contemporaries who felt that nothing value or worthy of study could come out of Ireland.

2.2.3 Mythology in "The Wanderings of Oisín"

"The Wanderings of Oisín" is Yeats's longest poem and it is a very dense mythological one. It is based on the lyrics of the Fenian Cycle of Irish mythology, and displays the influence of both Sir Samuel Ferguson and the pre-Raphaelite poets. The poem took two years to be completed, and was one of the few works from this early period that he did not disown in his maturity. Oisín introduces what was to become one of his most important themes; the appeal of the life of contemplation over the

⁴³ Proinsias Mac Cama, P.96.

⁴⁴ Mary Helen Thuente, P.266.

life of education.⁴⁵ The myth of Oisín is a tale about man who returns to his homeland after living 300 years in an eternal fairy paradise, providing generous insight into the history, experience, and mindset of settled traveler John Reilly and his family. The poem opens with a dialogue between Christianity and poetic myth, St. Patrick and Oisín, in which the representative of purely poetic myth is in the sadness of outrageous old age. As Oisín tells his story to St. Patrick, he is captured again by its spell, and his would be converter is reduced to lamenting: "You are still wrecked among heathen dreams." The heathen dreams of Oisín's first voyage take him to a land of youth, poetry, and love, where death appears to be unknown. But, to get there, Oisín "rode out from the human lands" with his temptress Niamh, whose name, symbolizes, to Yeats, "brightness and beauty." As the two lovers ride out, they see images "of the immortal desires of immortals," images of unfulfilled and unfulfillable desires. In the land of youthful dancers and lovers to which Oisín come, the song of human joy is heard by immortals as sadness. The songs of immortal joy are antinomian, and in that passion which is unholy, Oisín lives for a hundred years until he is recalled to human matters by a part of a warrior's broken lance, washed ashore on the island of immortals. And the first book ends with a magnificent chart of immortals prophesying the exhausted age that must come to a returned Oisín. The emblems of a mere natural fulfillment that await Oisín are the birds who murmur at the injustice of mutability, the mouse whose speed is only a weariness as the race into time destroys, and the fisher king turning into a ball of dust. But the immortals will abide in their youthful love until when the stars will drop, and a pale rose of the moon will wither away. Primary decay awaits Oisín, but the destruction of the immortals can come only when the forms of nature dissolve. The warning is the stronger for its dark paradox; to

⁴⁵ William Butler Yeats- Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, P.3.

choose nature is to be survived by nature, for the human cannot outlast the natural, but to choose the inhuman is to transcend nature, and yet to live as long as nature lives.⁴⁶

This dilemma becomes more intense in Book II. The emblems of ungratified desires, "youth and lands and the deer and the hounds," come by again, and Oisín and Niamh take up their journey, until they reach an island temple. This temple is demon, haunted, and the dusky demon is himself a protean singer, celebrant of a sand revelry, for his eyes are like the wings of kingfishers' emblems of the dust that is nature's. In the fight with Oisín, the demon assumes varied natural shapes, and appears to die at sunset. But he rises on the forth morn, beginning a new natural cycle, and fights Oisín until he is overcome at another sunset. Such rhythm of recurrence goes on for a hundred years, with three days of feasting alternating with one of fighting. What Oisín fights, stays, and yet must face perpetually again is his own double, the natural man or soul in him that will not finally die, but that also cannot finally overcome him. A beach-bough is borne to Oisín, emblematic of his last days, and the Island of Victories must be abandoned as the island of Dancing was. Oisín leaves a cyclic world, in which a frustrate victory yet induced no frustration, in order to get back toward a cyclic world in which no victories over nature are to be won, and yet a perennial frustration is induced.⁴⁷

In Book III, the guest leads to the Island of Sleepers as it must, for the flight from nature and towards a perpetual gratification of desires dooms the searcher identity sleep and poetry. As the lovers journey again, the familiar tableaux of "those that fled, and that followed" pass them, but now Oisín and Niamh recognize, with a sigh, the meaning of the visions.

⁴⁶ Harold Bloom, *Yeats* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 1970), P.97.

⁴⁷ Same source

As the second stanza of Book III makes clear the *gust* is now haunted by nostalgia for the human world, and an end to illusion (and to love and poetry) approaches. It comes in the darkness of an Island inhabited by "a monstrous slumbering fold," titans who have put aside their arms and their trophies, titans who are men and birds, unnatural representatives of an ironic naturalization of the human which is yet poetry. The bell branch "sleep's forebear," appears again, an emblem now of "inhuman sleep" that has come to these monster's who, however, are more beautiful than men. Oisín makes one heroic effort to rouse the sleepers, but his efforts leads only to his own yielding to the bell-branch, and he and Niamh sleep for a century, which he dreams of the human life he abandoned in his quest for a poet's world.⁴⁸

Awakened by the fall of a starling, and so startled by nature out of his profound, unnatural slumber, Oisín feels again "the ancient sadness of man" and abandons Niamh warned by her against even one touch of the earth, Oisín nevertheless, returns to the human and the natural, and to times' revenge's. For he returns to a Christianized Ireland, to humans bowed down by consciousness of natural sin and defect and he falls, weak and exhausted, into the world of St. Patrick. Though the poem ends with Oisín's defiant vow to descend to Hell from the company of his brothers, it ends also in passionate defeat, for the quest has been self-destructive. What Oisín has failed to learn is :a quest to thwart nature's limitations must seek out an object that itself shatters nature's value as well as context; the young Oisín had sought in a super-nature what only the imagination can give, and even then only with equivocation.⁴⁹

Yet Oisín is a hero, and his failed quest is Yeats's own. In the Anglo-Irish myth of the hero, Yeats had chosen to find a model for what he

⁴⁸ Harold Bloom, *Yeats* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 1970), P.97.

⁴⁹ Harold Bloom, *Yeats* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 1970), P.97.

hoped would be a new kind of antithetical quester, Yeats embraces the quest's natural defeat as a victory of a man divided against himself, natural against the imaginative neither capable of final victory over the other. Yeats sought in his writing to create fresh tradition and a unique style. He attempted to create a literature that was Irish in subject matter and tone. Yeats strove to reawaken in his people a sense of the glory and significance of Ireland's historical and legendary past.⁵⁰ According to Yeats, the vehicle to accomplish this was only through Irish mythology; and he found a treasury of symbols hitherto unused in English poetry. Turning mythical figures into private symbols was the vehicle by which Yeats sought to translate his life to mythical events represented by the symbols of Irish mythology.

2.2.4 "To the Rose Upon the Road of Time"

Many of Yeats's techniques that used in his early work have played in his "To the Rose Upon the Road of Time" particularly is his use of myth and folklore. Also this poem explains to some extent his preoccupation with the spiritual and mystical world. The poem is about a narrator (presumably Yeats himself, as most of his work of this type is written from his point of view, rather than actional characters') and his disdain for contemporary life, resulting in his wistful longing to be part of the Irish legends, to be something more than common man.⁵¹

Yeats uses the red rose to represent the mythological Ireland, beginning the poem with: "Red rose, proud rose, sad Rose of all my days!"(31). The Rose here represents Ireland, but it could also be seen as Maud Gonne, Yeats's always unrequited love. Yeats' story with Maud

⁵⁰ Frank N. Magill, ed. *Cyclopedia of World Author: Revised Edition*, volume III (Englewood Cliffs Nj: Salem press, 1974), P.

⁵¹ Matthew Bell, "Yeats, Nationalism, and Myth". Internet Source.

Goone runs parallels with his relationship with the mythical worlds as described here; which is beyond his grasp. The similarity is emphasized by the somewhat foreboding atmosphere of the first stanza, and the beginning of the second:

*Come near, come near, come near-Ah, leave me still
A little space for the rose-breath to all.*⁵²

While Yeats belongs to be part of this world, he has no delusions about it; he can see that it is without its own dangers and the things are not entirely perfect about it-the same applies to Maud Gonne, who could be very violent and fanatical person, being embroidered as she was in the volatile Irish politics of the day.

Yeats leaps straight into the mythological elements of the poem referring to Irish stories. Curiously, these stories are rather depressing and negative in their influence. By using phrases and words such as "the bitter tide:", "thine own sadness," and "grown old" Yeats does little to endear to us this world about which he is so enthusiastically writing. It is brief expedition into Irish lore ends on a decidedly melancholy note, referring to "lovely melody" perhaps the Irish songs that encapsulate the old stories.⁵³ This part of the poem serves to show us the magic of this other world, and also portrays its potential for destruction and pain. The stanza ends unexpectedly; after the negative aspects of the spiritual world have seemingly been described, Yeats writes that he will end there: "Eternal beauty wandering on her way."⁵⁴

Again, this is reference to both the spiritual world and Maud Gonne, both of which, to Yeats, embody "Eternal beauty" despite having many hidden perils. He claims that this perfect vision can only be seen if it is not obscured by "mans' fate." This can be interpreted in a number of

⁵² Same source

⁵³ Same source

⁵⁴ Famous Poems by Famous Poets "The Madness of King Goll" By W.B.Yeats, metrist Online.

ways. It was a reference to mans' ultimate fate, which is to die, or it could be more to do with mans' tendency to fall (" hopes that toil and pass") and lack certain qualities that Yeats thought important; man does not have Yeats's insight into the spiritual world, for a start. This is where the main theme and concern of the poem is first properly stated.

Yeats wants to be above the normal trappings of everyday life, he wants to transcend normal life and move towards apotheosis of a kind.⁵⁵

The narrative of the poem takes a cautious pause at the beginning of the stanza, as the narrator brings his passion under control and remembers the dangers that are associated with his obsession. The structure of the second stanza is very similar to that of the first, but in opposing fashion. Where as the first longed for the spiritual world and went on to describe it, the second begins with a wish to keep a hold on reality, so as not to lose the mortal worlds' various idiosyncrasies:

*The weak worm hiding down in its small cave,
The field-mouse running by me in the grass'
And heavy mortal hopes that toil and pass;*⁵⁶

The last line expresses Yeats' fundamental view of the real world to the unreal one; that is one of failure and pain, where his hopes never realized but only linger then die-again an oblique reference to his feelings towards Maud Gonne. Yeats then returns once more to his wish to join the spiritual world:

*But seek alone to hear the strange things said
By God to the bright hearts of those long dead,
And learn to chaunt a tongue men do not know.*⁵⁷

However much he wishes for the rose to come near, it can only ever be a wish-another "heavy mortal hope." That cannot be realized. All that

⁵⁵ Same source

⁵⁶ Same source

⁵⁷ "To the Rose upon the Road of Time", Help me. Com.

happens is that he keeps returning to the beginning, hoping over and over again for his fortunes to change and his dreams to come true; the Maude Gonne's influence in the poem is once again prevalent.⁵⁸

"Who Goes With Fergus" is a short poem of Yeats full of complexity and mystery. In it Yeats asks who will follow Fergus' example and leave the Cares of the world to know the wisdom of nature. His exhortation is that young men and women alike to leave loves' bitter mystery and to turn instead to the mysterious order of nature, over which Fergus rules.

On one level, the poem represents Yeats's exhortation to the young men and women of his day to give over their political and emotional struggle in exchange for a struggle with the lasting mysteries of nature. Yeats's suggestion is that Fergus was brave and wise to give up his political ambition in exchange for the wisdom of the Druids, and such sacrifice was complicated. For he did not find a life of frolic and happiness with the Druids (the Druids were the healers and priests of the ancient societies or the Celts who were a group who inhabited Ireland long before the Norman or British invasions.) But he did find knowledge, wisdom and perspectives too much, indeed.⁵⁹ On a second level, the poem captures Yeats's frustration at his own failed love affair. He is desperate to turn from the contemplative of loves' mysteries that have preoccupied him the thing that increased his sorrow without means of improving his situation. That's why he decided to take Fergus' direction and leave love behind him.

Moreover, the reference to the imagery of Fergus is to suggest Yeats's inclination to references to mythic and legendry heritage of his country rather than the present political struggles that engaged Ireland. Accordingly, the question, "Who goes with Fergus?" is a question to ask

⁵⁸ Same source

⁵⁹ Grade Saver: Poems of W. B. Yeats: The Rose- Study Guide.

Ireland to join him in contemplating the mythic past rather than the sticky present. Finally, in the poem there is a suggestion of a journey towards death. To return to nature, it expresses a movement away from worldly cares and passions analogous to death. Yeats summons the courage that one requires to look beyond the mysteries one knows and suffers under—those of love, of politics to deeper and wider mysteries— the wood, the sea, the wandering stars.⁶⁰

In the first poem of *Crossways*, "The Madness of King Goll", (Yeats gives the only answer he knows to the seas' cry). Goll is the precursor of Fergus in the *Rose* poems and of all the later questers in Yeats who will not find peace by abandoning nature for occult satisfactions. Goll is " a wise young king" praised for bringing back the age of gold, who in the midst of battle yields to the madness of vision, breaks his spear, and rushes off to become a wandering poet in the woods. He finds a "song less" harp, and sings to it; his singing "sang me fever-free," but now "my singing fades, the strings are torn." He is left in one early vision, to "wait beside the sea," now neither poet nor king, but mad oppressed by the natural. All through the poem beats the refrain: "They will not hush, the leaves-a- flutter around me, the beech-leaves old."⁶¹ The long line has uncanny farce, for the lines' meaning changes subtly as it is repeated. At first, the refrain seems to indicate only Goll's madness, the pathetic fallacy run wild, but as the lyric goes on, it comes to be with better understanding that the flattering of the leaves is itself a kind of natural supernaturalism, a force that Goll vainly sought to master, first through kingship and then through poetry. Goll's phantasmagoria fails because it

⁶⁰ Grade Saver: Poems of W. B. Yeats: The *Rose*- Study Guide.

⁶¹ Famous Poems by Famous Poets "The Madness of King Goll" By W.B.Yeats, metrist Online.

yield to nature, and his kingship failed because it yielded to vision. What matter to Yeats at this point is the poetic failure.⁶²

Although a nationalistic context was behind Yeats' interest in the ancient Celtic legends, Yeats was interested in reclaiming those legends as mere account of Ireland's history. By using old legends and myths as themes in his work, Yeats was after providing his audience with ideas and emotions that spark a faith in Ireland. So, instead of focusing on reviving the history of Ireland as a static movement; Yeats was interested in making his audience aware of what had already happened to Ireland, but rather in using Ireland's past as a starting point to inspire new feelings about modern Ireland.⁶³

⁶² Harold Bloom, *Yeats* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 1970), P.97.

⁶³ Reg Skene, *The Cuchulain Plays of W.B. Yeats: A Study* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), p.21.

CONCLUSION

Yeats's use of Celtic elements of myth and folklore, looks at how, in order to justify his view of Irish independence movement and the value of Irish history, he created his own form of elegiac poetry. Such form explains his poetry, re-created the ancient forms of Irish epic myths based upon old folkloric poems and created a new self enclosed schema of mythology within the framework of his own individual vision.

Also Yeats's use of Celtic myths which is an anticipation of modernism is frequently perceived as an attempt to escape from history, to avoid confronting the realities of modern life and from mass culture through to democracy.

The main purpose of the qualification work was to demonstrate how national identity can be constructed through literature, and, particularly, how the use of certain motifs and themes in Yeats's poetry supports the process of Irish self-fashioning. As the Irish identity, to a large extent, depended on the people's adherence to their racial Celtic substrate, and on differentiating themselves from the English, the Revival literature, which strove to support the self-fashioning process, turned to ancient myths and Celtic elements. Further, the thesis argued that the theme of transcendence in poetry symbolized the metaphorical transcendence of the Irish, who were reaching towards liberation.

Yeats was driven by a need to recover the landscape of Ireland, which he must begin through imagination because of the British presence: he began by reviving Celtic myth

In his early works, Yeats tries to revive Irish myths in a "pure" form, pulling strongly on figures from Celtic mythology in poems such as "The Hosting of the Sidhe"

This recreation is difficult, as Ireland never had a chance to define itself in modern terms independent from outside control:

Names of figures and myths have become Anglicized, even within the myths themselves.

The motifs Yeats chose to employ in the analysed works were closely connected to the Irish folk imagination of the 19th century; apart from the theme of mystic transcendence, the choice of the motifs points to themes topical in Yeats's times and related to the strives of the 19th century Ireland: desire, freedom, aspirations, insecurity, and vision of happiness.

In his later works, Yeats shifts to an overwhelmingly classical myth base.

Generally the myths he references are moments of violence that lead to great change, usually for the worse. Most frequent among these are:

- Troy
- Helen
- Leda and the Swan

Also shifts his focus to Byzantium, as opposed to Sligo, his boyhood home.

Yeats' mythological references within his work shift chronologically from trying to recreate purely Irish myth, to creating new myths and pulling on classical myths to support, to a focus on purely classical myth.

I believe this process is a result of his disillusionment following the Irish unwillingness to revive old tradition, tendency towards violent uprising, and the Great War. The Ireland of his imagination simply was not meshing with reality, causing his shift to a new myth (Byzantium) that he could not be proven wrong about.

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