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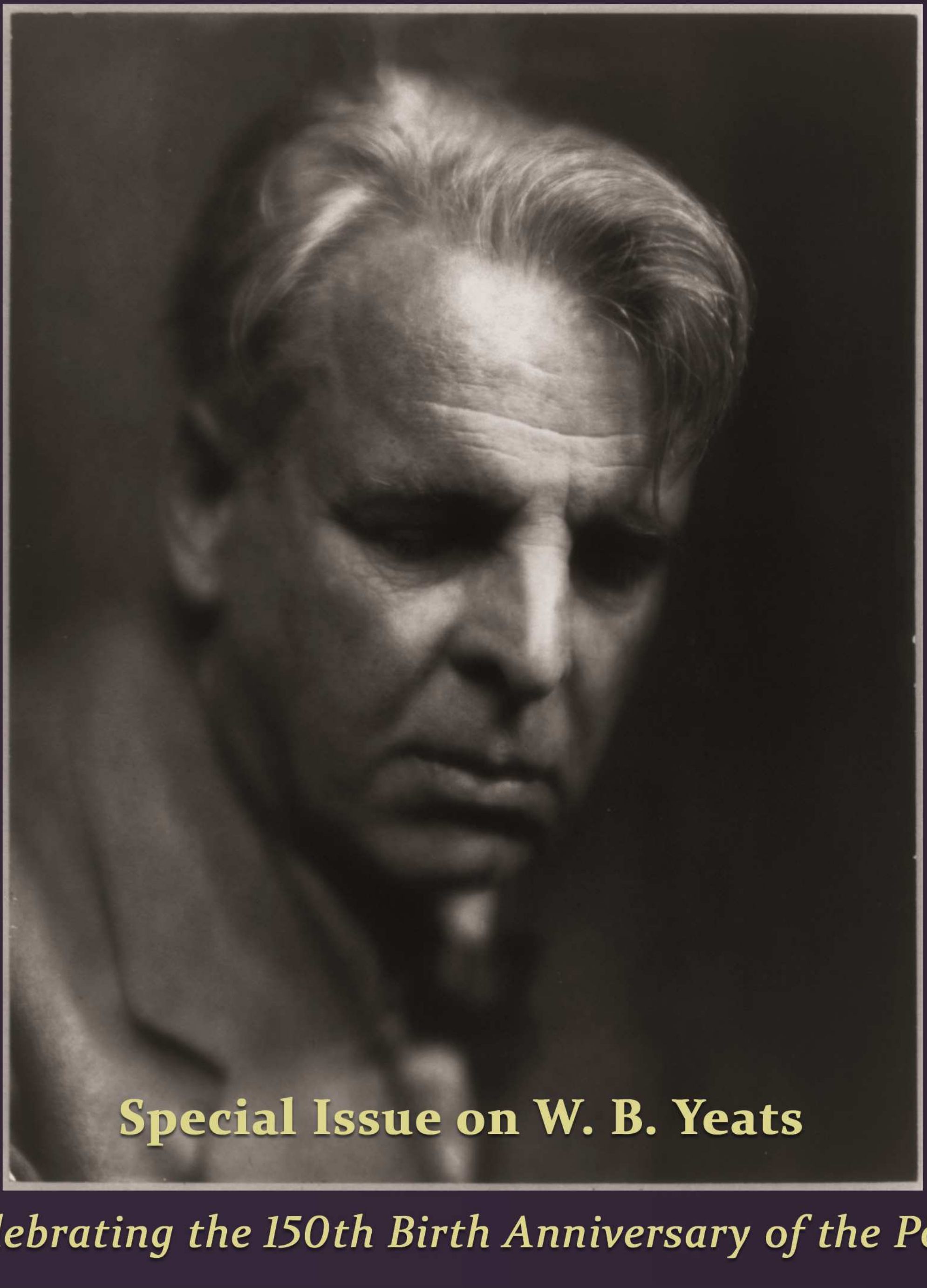

Special Issue on W. B. Yeats

Celebrating the 150th Birth Anniversary of the Poet

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A Magazine of English Literature

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Special Issue on W. B. Yeats
Volume 1, Number 3, 2015

Guest-edited by
Dr. Zinia Mitra
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Editorial

Now he is scattered among a hundred cities
And wholly given over to unfamiliar affections,
To find his happiness in another kind of wood
And be punished under a foreign code of conscience.
The words of a dead man
Are modified in the guts of the living.

(In Memory Of W.B. Yeats: W. H. Auden)

We were familiar with the name of W.B. Yeats since childhood as the writer of "Introduction" to English *Gitanjali* and revered him as a poet who had such profound understanding of Tagore. We hadn't read much of Yeats in childhood except one poem in ICSE book titled "An Irish Airman Foresees his Death", a memorial of Robert Gregory who was killed in WW-I where the speaker is given a godlike omniscience and the readers are elevated along with him above the clouds and the very act of war critiqued:

> Those that I fight I do not hate
> Those that I guard I do not love

Introduced by such an amazingly balanced poem where the balanced lines seem to mime the very act of flying, William Butler Yeats (1865 – 1939) the poet, the Nobel Prize winner, the senator, the critic, the man, never really ceased to amaze us even a hundred and fifty years after his birth. His expansive mental faculties explored a range of ideas – from the personal to national to international, critiquing oppression, forging an identity for himself and famously stimulating the Celtic revival. He can be approached as an esoteric dreamer, a caustic modern sceptic, an Irish patriot, an antinationalist, a shrewdly practical man and also as a solitary man, an unrealist, for, living in an era of flux in history, his ideas and aesthetics remained outrageously visionary. Is it this aspect, this human figure caught in a mesh of contradictions that makes us explore him to this day?

Yeats employed diverse frameworks in his work : mythological, with particular reference to Irish myths and legends, he also turned to reality, to theology with ideas gained not from any formal religious education but from his own involvement in mysticism, for, he took interest in the occult, in horoscope, séances, transforming his ideas into aesthetic masterpieces. Yeats reinvented himself persistently: Yeats the dreamer, the lover, the mad old man, the public figure, along with those around him, like Maud Gonne famously becomes Helen in "No Second Troy". The unleashing of violence fascinated him and he composed poetry finding in it a key to creative power: a terrible beauty is born. In "The Second Coming" he is a seer prophesying the dawn of an evil age. The proud magnificence of "Byzantium" and "Sailing to Byzantium" affirmed that he finally rejected the sensual music for the artifice of eternity. The indignation of "The Dolls" had presented us with the two extremities – the idea of the unbreakable serenity of artifice and the reality of the crude warmth of life. In "Among School Children" as a sixty- year old smiling public man he poses an eternal question:

How can we know the dancer from the dance? How can we know the soul apart from the body without which we have never known it, or even know which is the soul and which the body?

The contributors of this volume of The Goldenline Magazine engage with such unresolved anxieties in Yeats, with Yeats the poet, the lover, the playwright, the visionary and the man in all his resentments and generosity. The overwhelming response to this issue provides testimony to the fact that Yeats is relevant even today as he continues to be read and interpreted by readers of English poetry and silently blends with the landscape of Bengal with Jibanananda Das' falling autumn leaves that ceaselessly tune in a note of longing as the poet laments: "*Hay chil /sonali danar chil*"- the reader's at home aren't far away from Yeats:

> O curlew , cry no more in the air,
> Or only to the water in the West;
> Because your crying brings to my mind
> Passion-dimmed eyes and long heavy hair
> That was shaken out over my breast:
> There is enough evil in the crying of wind.

Zinia Mitra
Editor

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The Later Yeats: A Romantic Modernist?

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Serious readers of William Butler Yeats usually note a shift of tone in the later part of his poetic career. Those who find a sense of continuity in his works speak of his reversion to 'the same themes,' a constant 'remaking' of 'his poems and himself from the old material' (Press 7). While his later poems, argues Press, appeared to be 'over-decorative, languorous, shadowy and imprecise,' his later poems are more precise, direct and complex. In a letter to Katharine Tynan written on 14 March 1888, he characterised his early poetry as one of 'longing and complaint' while he hoped to write poetry of 'insight and knowledge' later. In another letter written on 21 December, 1888 he observed, his need was to "substitute the feelings and longings of nature for those of art" (qtd. in Press 7).

His interest in nature and 'longing' is evident in his romantic poems like "The Stolen Child" (1889),"The Lake Isle of Innisfree" (1892) and "When You are Old" (1892). But from around 1908-9 he seemed to be veering away from this trend. Issues related to art occupied much of his attention in his later poetry. The period of wide-eyed wonder and ambitious visions was over; he was now more concerned with revision of the earlier visions in the light of his recent disenchantment with the politics of the new Irish state in which he was directly involved. The visibility of indiscipline and the outbreak of violence in the new Ireland made him look upon democracy with distaste as the 'evils' of 'mobocracy' became more and more evident to him. His love for Maud Gonne, a beautiful but daring woman whom he first met in 1889, came to no fruition. She married MacBride, a fellow Irish revolutionary activist, in 1903. His relationship with his father too and the 'inadequacy' of his formal education, as critics like Miranda B. Hickman point out, created self-doubt which made him seek a way-out. Ideologically, he was drawn to Fascism which, he felt, would be an answer to the growing menace of mass violence. It is in the context of such a situation that his poetry registered changes both in form and content. He now sought his own re-formed 'romantic' vision in a direct resolute way that assumed modernist accents. The poetry of this stage was more a poetry of 'insight and knowledge' than one of 'longing and complaint.'

The issue of precision and hardness of images that come with experience in his later poems may be probed in this respect. Although within the short span of this article it may not be possible to explore the intricacies of his images, their main thrust may nevertheless be analysed. In "The Circus Animals' Desertion" (1939) which also features Maud Gonne ("I thought my dear must her own soul destroy, / So did fanaticism and hate enslave it") Yeats seeks, in vain, for 'a theme' and feels that he must instead look within for this theme, that "I must be satisfied with my heart" (Ferguson 1102). His projection of the "circus animals [which] were all on show" (the image of the circus animal suggesting the absurdity and meaninglessness of the life as it is) is carried out through modernist images:

> A mound of refuse or the sweeping of a street,
>
> Old kettles, old bottles, and a broken can,
>
> Old iron, old bones, old rags, that raving slut

Who keeps the till. Now that my ladder's gone,
I must lie down where all ladders start,
In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart.
(Ferguson 1103)

These lines project a barren, decrepit, decadent urban space which is very much the domain of modernist discourse. The street, a space for movement, is here cluttered with dirt, rejected materials which obstruct movement ('mound of refuse,' '[o]ld kettles, old bottles, and a can/Old iron, old bones, old rags' etc). Spatially speaking, the city and its streets which clog movements of lives occupy an important position in modernist representations. The images in the above poem remind us of those used by Eliot in his early poems. In "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," for instance, the street is a dominant image which gestures towards a movement which never takes place because of the overwhelming presence of dirt, decadence and obstruction: 'half-deserted streets,' 'narrow streets,' 'restless nights,' 'sawdust restaurants,' 'fog' and so on. The evocation of the sense of decadence is overwhelmingly present in both the poems. But the subjects who people this urban world are either zombies or are affected by disease and old age. In Eliot's poem the motif of the old age as a sign of developing hopelessness ("I grow old… I grow old…/I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled") is very much life-threatening while in Yeats' poem too the same motif of the advent of old age announces loss of vitality and agency. Interestingly, in both the poems a strong 'I' element is present. In Eliot, the persona is placed in fragmentally drawn imagined situations but in Yeats this seems to be more relevant to his own personality as it is more direct and the poem is interspersed with veiled personal references. Yeats's frustration with 'dying generations' and the prevalent sterility is more openly – and, it appears, personally – revealed.

In Yeats the absurdity of the old age and its uselessness, as I have indicated earlier, is more direct. There are beautiful lines to express his hopelessness:

WHAT shall I do with this absurdity –
O heart, O troubled heart—this caricature,
Decrepit age that has been tied to me
As to a dog's tail? ("Tower")
And again
An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick,
("Sailing to Byzantium")

The lines appear to be the cry of the heart of a nostalgic individual trapped in a tragic situation and is at a loss how to respond. It is a crisis very modern in nature and needs to be expressed in modernist idiom – in a language which must be precise, imagistic, and relieved of all romantic excess or dross. The images underline the contemporary situation which is full of decadence. Examine, for instance the following lines from "Sailing to Byzantium" (1927):

THAT is no country for old men. The young
In one another's arms, birds in the trees

— Those dying generations—at their song,
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.
Caught in that sensual music all neglect
Monuments of unageing intellect.

He must circumvent the process indicated by "Whatever is begotten, born and dies." There is a clear escape motif in this poem, an escape into the ancient city of Byzantium – the city and its art which appropriately 'symbolise a way of life in which art is frankly accepted and proclaimed as artifice. As artifice, as a work of the intellect, this art is not subject to the decay and death that overtake the life of "natural things"' (Fergusson 1094 n8). One notes the precision of the image of a human life that is "sick with desire/ And fastened to a dying animal" (1095). Desperate to escape the life of an animal doomed to death, he seeks to relocate permanently to Byzantium. One finds a romantic escape motif in the poem couched in an imagistic language.

Yeats speaks of 'unpurged images' in his poem "Byzantium" (1932). While there is no purging of images within the scope of the poem "The Circus Animals' Desertion," the purging is carried out in poems like "Sailing to Byzantium" or "Byzantium" by his purported visits to the ancient city. In "Byzantium," for example, 'the world of "mere complexities," the world in which man is in a state of becoming, is banished from the poem at the beginning as the "unpurged images of day" have been banished" (Ferguson 1098 n1). C.K.Stead finds this purging of the romantic dross to be important achievements in poets like Yeats and Eliot. This process of purging is also evident in the modernist poet's attempt to use a 'geometric' vocabulary even while dealing with a mystic experience.

I shall briefly discuss this aspect in Yeats' volume *A Vision* which was first published in 1925-6. It was later revised extensively and the second edition came out in 1937. In the in-between period Yeats was involved in editing the volume as he was not certain about how to articulate his own occult experience.A mystical experience is romantic at core because it comes from the depth of a subject but it is also an experience in which the distinction between the subject and object, as Paul Davies maintains, is erased and the communication is secularised. Yeats was here communicating the 'system' handed down to him by the 'Communicators' through his wife George who acted as the medium. He observes, "Exposition in sleep came to an end in 1920, and I began an exhaustive study of some fifty copy books of automatic script, and of a much smaller number of books recording what had had come in sleep" (Yeats 17-18). Now all these needed to be arranged. The 'dream materials' are arranged by him with the help of 'geometrical symbolism.' The volume is full of extremely complex geometrical figures like 'The Great Wheel,' 'unshaded cone,' Gyres, 'Concords' and 'Discords.' These constitute his 'mystic Geometry.' Yeats observes, "… now that the system stands out clearly in my imagination I regard them as stylistic arrangements of experience comparable to the cubes in the drawings of Wyndham Lewis and to the ovoids in the sculpture of Brancusi. They have helped me to hold in a single thought reality and justice" (25).The geometric lexicon, it has been pointed out, explores the patterns underlying the history of Western civilisation, the progress of the individual soul through life and death." It is a narrative of a mystical epistemology. Hickman, referring to Surette, points out the centrality of the occult to the development of modernism. He also refers to Materer's *Modernist Alchemy* where the latter "addresses in valuable detail an oscillation between skepticism and credulity that he [Materer] identifies as characteristic of many modernist writers attracted by the occult" (Hickman 192). The use of the geometric lexicon and models, he argues, may be a 'self-protective strategy' because Yeats's "longing for the occult was always checked by his scepticism" (Hickman 219). He identifies a strong Vorticist tendency in this geometric mysticism. He observes that Yeats read both Hulme's "Modern Art" and Wyndham Lewis's Time and Western Man both of which influenced his own art. Hulme and Lewis felt that 'geometric tendency' would be very useful in visionary arts. Hickman observes, "Geometry, then, seems to signify for Yeats the primary tincture: that which moves towards the direction of objectivity, unity and the extinction of individual personality that which lies beyond the limits of the individual self" (Hickman 238). It is in this sense that Yeats' later poems transcend the loose romantic idiom and become materials for the modernist 'poetic.'

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“The Wrong Supernatural World”: Yeats’s Mystic Revision

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New York University

Summary

Although Yeats often pointed to mysticism as an ideal framework for understanding the physical world, his 1937 emendations to *A Vision* seem to countermand this. A closer look reveals, however, that Yeats’s intent was not to discount his earlier effort, but to mislead skeptics like T.S. Eliot in order that he might subvert controversy and strengthen the work’s revelatory experience.

When W.B. Yeats revised *A Vision* in 1937, he did so with the following admission: the original text, published a decade earlier, had misinterpreted the core philosophy “upon which the coherence of the whole depended”(19). Yeats further admits that such a mistake fills him “with shame,” and commits in the new volume to redact or correct it wherever possible (19). From this, a reader might expect a clarification of esoteric language, or a more attentive illustration of the work’s arcane concepts. Instead, despite a longstanding conviction towards their literal accuracy, Yeats appears to entirely discount the range of mystic subjects populating his texts. He apologizes if it seems as though, “overwhelmed by miracle as all men must be when in the midst of it,” he had taken “such periods [of supernatural encounter] literally,” and assures us that his faculty of reason has since recovered sufficiently that he now regards these writings as merely “stylistic arrangements of experience” (25). That is to say, the cones and gyres, ghosts and spirits, experiments with magic, and automatic writing detailed throughout the text (and his greater body of work) should be understood as metaphor working towards the illumination of a deeper subject, but not as the subject itself. And yet this relegation of Yeats’ mystic scholarship to technical aestheticism is not especially persuading when we consider its context. In *Modernist Alchemy* Timothy Materer suggests that this self-dismissal, issued by Yeats late in his literary career, is actually a strategy to “avoid arguments or win over a skeptical audience” (27)—an intentional but insincere subversion of the material intended to, if not attract a wider readership, at least avoid any chance of critical debate. If we accept the latter option, we may also consider it a direct response to T.S. Eliot’s charges against Yeats in *After Strange Gods*. Published in 1934, and therefore only a few years before the revised *A Vision*, Eliot says of Yeats in *After Strange Gods*: his “verse is stimulated by folklore, occultism, mythology and symbolism, crystal-gazing and hermetic writing,” that while aesthetically beautiful, is in itself “highly artificial” (44, 45). If indeed Yeats’ explanation of his “stylistic arrangements” in *A Vision* is a kind of apology to Eliot and those who shared Eliot’s skeptical views, it does not seem to be an especially passionate apology, or one that is long lived. Whereas Eliot’s formal project in *The Waste Land* conscribes ghosts, sorceresses, and other mystic systems in an unapologetically exoteric form, Yeats, in beginning a work devoted to the explication of a mystic system by renouncing that system as merely a stylized experience, seems actually to strengthen the work’s esoteric shell.

We need only look to Yeats’ earlier writing to locate a strong hold against his surprising reaction. In *Ideas of Good and Evil* Yeats makes the assertion that readers and poets alike, from all eras, practicing in all genres, “cannot separate the idea of an art or a craft from the idea of a cult with ancient technicalities and mysteries,” or, indeed, separate “learning from witchcraft” (13). While he may mean specifically that the literary tradition is cult-like in nature, the ultimate evolution of his own work proves literature’s ability to inform independent cults rather than simply reflect existent ones. Yeats was concerned with an occultation of literature from a grand perspective, and believed the poet served the same essential function as the occult cleric in that his task was to initiate the reader into a secret order. Only those adept enough to "read the signs" and absorb the transmission of the secret wisdom tradition held within the poet's work could be said to have undergone spiritual improvement; all others were foiled by "shallow wits" (Yeats, Poems 207). It should be noted that this esoteric tradition is distinctly different from literary symbolism, which is intentionally open to the interpretation of any educated reader. Indeed, "occult exegesis does not deploy some key or code…which would permit [just] anyone to reveal the secret meaning of encoded texts," rather there is held to be "a single esoteric meaning which can be cleanly and unambiguously derived" only by those who are "enlightened or initiated" (Surette 33).

It was not Yeats' goal to invent an esoteric mythology, but rather to expound the one he believed was *a priori* within history, and to depict it adequately enough to proselytize—or initiate—potential adepts. In *A Vision* Yeats explains that history is entirely the result of certain spirits who direct the actions of mortals and initiate a select few for inclusion in the wisdom tradition through the path to enlightenment. Moreover, if one could identify the patterns of these spirits or become a member of their order, it would be possible to predict mass historical changes. To this end Yeats writes in *A Vision* that "things move by mathematical necessity, all changes can be dated by gyre and cone, and pricked beforehand upon the Calendar" (lvii). Indeed, the foremost intention of *A Vision* is to describe a secret and ancient tradition closely resembling the types of rituals in which Yeats himself partook, both at private gatherings and during the course of his membership in various occult orders (Owen 46, 64).

The bulk of the information detailed in *A Vision* is established, not by Yeats himself, but through a series of formal literary frames. Working under the preconceived notion that "a visionary experience is the one unquestionable reality for the person who undergoes it," Yeats uses a collection of stories, told purportedly in the words of historic figures, to strengthen and legitimize the text's authority (Longenbach 23). The core of Yeats' strategy in establishing "a line of transmission of the gnosis from high antiquity through the classical and medieval worlds to the present"(Surette 19) is achieved therefore, like it is for Eliot in *The Waste Land* and Pound in *The Cantos*, through systematic fragmentation. Yeats toils at some length to connect the accounts of "certain Irish countrymen" who "had seen Spirits departing from them in an ascending gyre" alongside Descartes's mathematical conception of a gyre, "Boehme and his gyre," and similar allusions "in many writers back to antiquity" (*Vision* 103). He finds, due to its persistence in recorded history, that the symbol of a gyre or cone is a good analogue for the motions of the human mind and inner consciousness, and from this determines that two inverted gyres, expanding and contracting in opposite force, suitably describe *Anima Hominis* and *Anima Mundi*—soul of man and soul of the world. Essentially, the gyre is the platform upon which all life is supported, and, as a result of its endless fluctuation, necessitates all life as catastrophic (106).

Yeats goes on to illuminate certain classifications established by the "wisdom tradition," illustrated in contemporary analogues. In describing a certain phase of the lunar calendar, for example, Yeats finds Eliot and Pound guilty of imbalance: they tend towards "technical research to the entire exclusion of the personal dream." Yeats continues: "I find at this 23rd Phase…hatred of the abstract," men who "eliminate from metaphor the poet's phantasy [sic] and substitute a strangeness discovered by historical or contemporary research" (175). Just as Eliot had condemned Yeats for his artificial esotericism, Yeats accuses Eliot of engaging a kind of anti-poetry that is nothing more than an "accurate record of the relevant facts," or merely a string of "associated ideas or words that seem to drift into the mind by chance" (*Oxford* xxxv; *Vision* 175).

Although in *A Vision* Yeats likewise accuses Pound of being "absorbed in…technical research," Pound has similar issue to take with Eliot's apparent reliance on erudite history (174). In canto 29, Pound describes a conversation with Eliot in which Eliot admits he is "afraid of the life after death" (Pound 145). Pound does not share Eliot's fear because he has, by way of his own spiritual studies, gained "the power to escape death" (Materer 11). For Pound, Eliot has failed to grasp the significance of the Yeatsian cycle and is therefore "preoccupied with the fear of death," (42). In Eliot's view, and despite Pound's claim, neglecting to receive the Yeatsian cycle in his work is not a failing but the result of partiality towards an apparently incompatible Christian doctrine of belief. While spirituality is of the highest importance in his poetry, to Eliot Yeats' avenues of inquiry are misguided; rather than ignorance, his position is found in a dismissal of Yeats' mysticality as "the wrong supernatural world" (*Strange Gods* 45). This position is further elucidated in base terms when Eliot writes in the same text that "it is in fact in moments of moral and spiritual struggle…[that] we are all very much alike" (42). Rather than the function of esoteric systems, for Eliot spiritualism forms a universality.

Although Eliot was concerned that Pound was "mixed up with Mr. Yeats' spooks," he nevertheless sought Pound's contribution in his writing of *The Waste Land*, not only for the poem's stylistic and rhetorical structure, but also, as Leon Surette points out: "Eliot submitted his long poem to Pound's scrutiny specifically because he knew Pound to have some competence in occult theories and beliefs" (Materer 66; Surette 239). Pound's competence in occult systems can in turn be traced to Yeats, and while Pound and Yeats never agreed on the specifics of occultism—Pound, for example, was highly critical of Yeats' studies in magic—it is known that the two attended séances, read many of the same occult texts during their winters spent together at Stone Cottage in Sussex, and like Yeats, "Pound believed that spiritual masters guide mortals, who may become initiates of the 'wisdom philosophy' on the road to enlightenment" (Longenbach 184; Materer 54). Despite a difference of opinion with Yeats on certain occult matters, Pound was dedicated to creating a work with the same esoteric formulae as *A Vision*. In canto 74 Pound writes that "ghosts move about me" "patched with histories," while cantos 90 and 91 are dedicated to the process of mystic palingenesis (Pound 466; Typhonopoulos 169). In all, *A Vision* and *The Cantos* seem designed towards the same end:"both texts are esoteric enough to define their own readership and create a secret society of readers who understand the codes" (Materer 146). Similarly, Demetres Typhonopoulos in *The Celestial Tradition* argues that Pound's cantos are:

> intended to be read in a fashion similar to Hermetic palingenetic literature. With this model, the author plays the role of the mystagogue and presents a description of a 'mystery' in the hope that his presentation will have the same impact upon the reader as a ritual revelation or mystical vision. Only the…"neophyte" will be able to perceive and experience the mystery. (6)

Such a reading is corroborated by Pound's own comments that the goal of art in general is not to openly divulge information, but rather to craft a revelatory experience: "the most poignant songs," Pound claims, for example, "have been often written in cipher—of necessity" (Typhonopoulos 9; Longenbach 95).

Presumably the necessity Pound speaks of has to do with a work's impact on the reader: without a revelatory experience a work of art may be significantly less important in the reader's consideration. To that end, Pound keeps *The Cantos* couched in esoteric verbosity. More than the ghosts of canto 74 and elsewhere, more than the hundreds of contemporary and historical reference points, more than the multitude of living and dead languages, *The Cantos* are "fragments shored against ruin" (Pound 801). Likewise, "since the mystery [of *The Cantos*] cannot be shown or explained, Pound does not attempt to discuss any of the details of the initiatory experience" (Typhonopoulos119),and rather leaves these details to the perception of the initiate-reader himself, an approach in line with Yeats's own, and one opposed to Eliot's sense of spiritual unity.

Pound's method in *The Cantos* is precisely what Yeats accuses him of in *A Vision*: full reliance on "historical or contemporary research" circumventing "the logical processes of thought by flooding them with associated ideas or words that seem to drift into the mind by chance" (175). Ironically, this analysis may have indicated to Pound that Yeats himself was one among the uninitiated, capable of viewing *The Cantos* as a "technical and emotional masterpiece," but unable to grasp its "allegorical expressions of…spiritual and political values" (Longenbach 93). Although Pound's work functions much like the type of esotericism that Yeats studied at length, in that it "calls up the souls of enlightened individuals, both dead and alive," it does so in a poetic style very different to Yeats' own (Typhonopoulos 102). For Pound, Yeats' poetic symbolism was undesirable because his "symbolism has usually been associated with mushy technique" (Pound *LE* 5) whereas his own Imagism, with its direct treatment of the image, found "the natural object [to be] always the adequate symbol," and therefore not a symbol at all (Surette 5). If Pound did actually intend *The Cantos* to function as mystical revelation then his inclusion of the line "[t]hese fragments I have shored against my ruins" appropriated from *The Waste Land* in canto 8 and again in canto 110 indicate that, while he may not have seen *The Waste Land* itself as a revelatory instruction, he certainly thought the poem could form part of the initiation his own work represents.

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Exploring the Postmodern Poetics of William Butler Yeats

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The literary world considers W.B. Yeats as a modernist in his inclination towards Irish myth, folklore, the Irish Literary Movement, Irish history and historicity, and above all the sordid values of human life and existence. Embedded in an environment of modernism, Yeats' writings- his poems, plays and prose-writings- bring back the elements of historicity. It is interestingly surprising to discern elements of postmodernism in his poems and other writings. Despite scant critical analyses, Yeats nowadays enjoys some noticeable ingredients of postmodernism and may be ranked as a postmodernist in the same way as Henry James, James Joyce and Ezra Pound. But it is a difficult enterprise to postmodernize W.B. Yeats. As Naomi Schor sees: "Postmodernism … is not the name of a belated movement that follows modernism… rather, it is a moment in and of modernism"(x-xi). Ihab Hassam has recently joined with Karl, Calinesch and Habermas to define postmodernism by using the vocabulary of Derrida and Foucault in order to differentiate postmodernism from modernism. Jean Francois Lyotard's "The Postmodern Condition" writes: "A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher; the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by pre-established rules… The artist and writer … are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what will have been done" (81). Lyotard further notes "Postmodern would have to be understood according to the paradox of the future (post) anterior (modo)" (81). However, O' Hara does not hesitate to assert that the "major critical movements from the 1940s to the 1970s – New Criticism, archetypal and phenomenological criticism, and a variety of post Structuralist discourses (revisionary psychoanalytic criticism, dialectical hermeneutics, and deconstruction) all owe a considerable debt to Yeats (349-68). As a "Sublime master of the concrete universal, demonic adversary of genuine Romantic visionaries, or seductive forerunner of the vertiginous interplay of self-subverting tropes" (Hara 349-68), Yeats has frequently made his appearance as a representative in each case.

Linguistic and Structuralist analyses have concentrated mainly upon "Leda and the Swan", "Among School Children", and "Sorrow of Love ". Some remarkable attempts have been made in the sphere of Feministic Criticism. However, Daniel O' Hara contemplates in applying hermeneutics to Yeats in his "Tragic Knowledge: Yeats's Autobiography and Hermeneutics." O' Hara and Bove find in Yeats' "Sailing to Byzantium" an ironical and subversive modern text in which Yeats has constructed a dualistic strategy which at once reveals the ironic consciousness of the poet. The persona has been caught in the temporal world which prompts the desired fiction of "Byzantium"; while the stance of the poet is "deconstructed" (Bove 121 -22), "the metaphysical interest of the persona appears as the motive for his comforting projection of a lost, but recoverable, artificial paradise" (Bove 129-30) . Beckett, Ionesco, Sartre and the later Yeats along with numerous postmodern poets have employed Kierkegaard's technique of mastered irony in order to destroy the sterilizing pervasive irony of modernism. Recent American deconstructive critics like Harold Bloom in his "Yeats", Geoffrey Hartman in "Criticism in the Wilderness", Paul de Man in "Allegories of Reading" and J.Hillis Miller in "The Linguistic Movement" have rendered valuable criticisms on some Yeatsian works.

Both Geoffrey Hartman and Paul de Man demonstrate the indecidable and indeterminable nature of poetry in "Among School Children" and "Leda and the Swan". De Man expects that the last line of "Among School Children" be read literally rather than figuratively as the literal reading leads to 'greater complication of theme and statement' (11). Again Hartman finds that "Leda and the Swan" cannot be explained away by the 'co-ordinates of ordinary perception, by stable space time categories' (24-25). Furthermore, Yeats' "The Second Coming" may be read as a poem 'to keep it there, not to resolve it into available meanings' (245-25). J.Hillis Miller concentrates on emblematic strategies; he has perhaps been influenced by Derrida , Man, Freud and Walter Benjamin in his critical examination of Yeats' "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen". Miller demonstrates that the meaning of the Yeatsian emblem can be identified not in relation to what the emblem signifies, in a sign-thing structure but in relation to other emblems, whether in the same poem or in other texts, in a sign-sign relation. This relationship has been characterized by the temporal gap between the two emblems and to some archetypes. The critical analyst must cross the gulf with a leap. Miller's study on Yeats seems to be a marked significance in discerning postmodernistic /poststructuralist elements in Yeatsian thoughts and ideas in his assertion "Each is destroyed and renewed by being made into a sign that stands for that which there is no standing and no standing for"(342-43). In spite of all these recent researches and discoveries, little has been done in respect of variety, quantity and polysemantic nature of Yeats' work.

The disorienting stress which Yeats has inflicted his narrators to experience in a poem like "Easter, 1916" is a destructively intensified dimension of the opposition he faces whenever he recounts his own disentangled definitions of existence, life exists through willing and joyous or unwilling and mournful sacrifice of life. "Easter, 1916" , " Meditations in Time of Civil War" and "1919" offer us the promise of a specific detail which is instantly betrayed. In the latter two poems some sort of structural clarity and rigidity exists which ultimately determine the development of the narrator's utterances. Yeats' device of a first person narrator may be misleading as he speaks "talk to me of originality and I will turn on you with rage … I am a lonely man I am nothing".

Sexual politics in Yeats gains prominence in his "Leda and the Swan". Yeats recognizes a textual sexual politics in his own poem which becomes a metaphor for the iron law of a new political order overcoming an older one. Yeats has been contemplative upon the violent rape of Leda by Zeus. The poetic description of Yeats has been unbearably beautiful and despicable as well: "The feathered glory from her loosening thighs! / All the stretched body's laid on the white rush /And feels the strange heart beating where it lies. / Her thighs caressed / By the dark webs" focuses Zeus' attention to the details of amorous conquest. This simply demonstrates Zeus' power at Leda's expense. Yeats' poem merely serves as a link in the iron chain of association which calls up the sexual textual politics of " the broken wall, the burning roof and tower / And Agamemnon dead" whenever Leda has been mentioned yet Yeats' commentary in "A Vision" does not turn out to be an unrelieved deconstruction, theory rendering natural the text's necessary self blindness. Yeats has admitted that he cannot answer the questions raised by his own poetic thinking. Leda and Zeus might belong to history yet they are symbolic of refutations of history along with culture, habits and systems.

In "A Vision" further critical assessments have been made; the rejection has been attributed to Zeus and not to Leda and this demonstrates the change from one age to another as an issue of power rather than knowledge. In this case "Leda" links itself with a poem of historical transformation, "The Second Coming". "When a vast image of Spirituous Mundi / Troubles my sight …/ And what rough beast, its hour came round at last, / Slouches toward Bethlehem to be born!" Yeats has been contemplative in putting "The Second Coming" and "Leda and the Swan" to work within the orbit of his system. The postmodern readers have been well aware of Yeats metaphor for Bethlehem. The nightmarish condition of irreligious system derives its impetus from the violence spread all around. Yeats cannot but recognize in the vast image out of Spirituous Mundi the confusion and lawlessness enswallowing the current existence and directions of life. Yet the metaphors used by Yeats engender a hypothetical potential equal in seriousness but superior to the iron law of antithesis and the "poetics of hate" (Joseph M. Hassett). Yeats has ignored Leda's culture or that of the rough beast but these images ultimately raise the question of power and politics. The poem finally emerges as a feministic text on power politics between the sexes not at the expense of either Leda or the vast humanity which have rejected religion. William Johnsen aptly conceptualizes the imaginings of a Leda who can at the very least refuse consent to Zeus, the positive equalizing of the sexes in a nonviolent society, where religion, if it is to have a future, means that all are ligated to each other through the imitation of love not war without exception.

Freud in his 1919 essay "The Uncanny" has listed some things, persons, impressions, events and situations which are able to arouse in us a feeling of the uncanny in particularly forcible and definite form,… wax work figures ingeniously constructed dolls and automata (226). Yeats' conception of the doll as icon also brings back Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject. Freud sees the doll as the significant element of childhood life but Helen Cixous and Naomi Schor have commented on Freud's failure to explicate thoroughly the uncanny significance of dolls. Yeats has recalled an unusual situation in his "The Dolls," a poem about a doll maker and the reaction of the dolls while a child is born to the doll maker and his wife. Obviously the poem recalls the awakening uncanny feelings sensed by Freud himself. In "The Dolls" poems dolls serve as icons-not the body made object but the body made subject. Yeats' dolls seem to be the products of the artist's symbolic world, their existence. Again to mention Kristeva the dolls reject as signifiers of the baby's life and his eventual death; this constitutes the requisite fact of existence not at all caring for the human child as symbol. In "The Dolls," they are the "me miserable treasure of the signifying act" (128), as well as the subject or ego.

Yeats has called "A Vision" "an elaborate classification of humanity, a symbolic system with prophetic possibilities" (Yeats "A Vision"). "A Vision" presents itself not merely as a transhistorical piece of prose but also as a work that demonstrates in abstract terms the evolving pattern of self representation in modern Irish culture. We may comply with Foucault's positioning of his own historical enquiries. Like Foucault Yeats has also been concerned that each era imposes limitation on thought and action.

Bakthinian influence however has tasked W.B. Yeats which may be seen in some important parallels with Bakhtin's thought. The poet has stressed upon poetry as an oral form. He further recognizes that the roots of art have been embedded in the people- the folk. Again the central conflict for Yeats reveals itself through his famous doctrine of the Masque in which the self erects an oppositional anti -self against which it stands in tension. For Yeats the spoken word is real, present, the written is insubstantial and abstraction and in this case we may find some symptoms which Derrida has discovered in his search for a meaning of the text. Yeats' "1919" bespeaks the voice of general human experience-the voice of nothing. Where a Derridean reading finds the self-questioning and splintering of Yeats' voice(s) an aspect of the poem's impetus to interrogate the arbitrary nature of signs in a text, a Bakhtinian reading lingers on the interplay of voices.

Debates have mounted upon W.B. Yeats as Marxist feministic explorations on Yeats' writing seem to have rocked the minds of the postmodern critics. The posterity will be glad to have a handful of critical investigations linking not merely to the tradition of history but also to the continually demanding contemplations of the readers engrossed with the chaos and confusion postmodernity generates. Yeats we may anticipate, would surely be included in the category of writers to whom postmodernity has generously gifted.

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Beyond the Orientalist Discourse: A Reading of Yeats's 'Introduction' to Tagore's Gitanjali

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Since the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978, the terms- 'Orient' and 'Orientalism' have become buzz words in the field of the post-colonial studies. The Orientalist discourse is a political discourse that legitimizes the difference between the Occident/ West and the Orient/ East and upholds the superiority of the Occidental culture. Identifying the Orient as 'Other' and inferior to the West, the Orientalist discourse has defined the Orient in terms of certain stereotypes like cruelty, sensuality, seductiveness, laziness, inaccuracy, indiscipline, backwardness and others. Apart from these stereotypes, the Orient has also been associated with mysteries and decadence and has been represented as "a living tableau of queerness" (Said 103). Actually, the Occident/West has mapped the Orient/East in terms of those aspects which the westerners never associate with themselves and the Orient has been seen by the West as a "surrogate and even an underground self" (Said 3). Apart from this the Orientalist discourse has presented the people living in the East not as individuals who have intellect, choice, free will and voice of their own, but as masses whose actions are determined by some specific instincts and emotions. To quote Peter Barry, "It [the East] also tends to be seen as homogenous, the people living there being anonymous masses, rather than individuals, their actions determined by instinctive emotions (lust, terror, fury, etc.) rather than by conscious choices or decisions" (193-194).

But the literary responses towards the Orient changed fast from the last part of the nineteenth century. Flaubert and Schegel in the 19th century substantially challenged and debunked this stereotypical image of the Orient. With the turning of time to the 20th century, this tradition gained more momentum as T.S. Eliot, T.E. Lawrence, Yeats and others dreamt of a Europe, regenerated and revitalized by Asia. They, going beyond the conventional image of the Orient as inferior to the Occident, stressed that the Oriental/Eastern culture can heal the Occident from the malady of materialism and different types of schisms. Like them Yeats also realized that the Oriental philosophy can provide cultural unity in the Occident and he felt a genuine interest in the writings and philosophy of Mohini Chatterjee, Shri Purohit Swami and, of course, Rabindranath Tagore. In Rabindranath Tagore, he saw a unified culture that has not been destroyed, subverted and disorganized anyway by modernization and colonization. He envisaged this Oriental culture as the ideal one for the West where culture, having been fragmented, had lost its primeval purity. This paper, using Yeats' 'Introduction' to Tagore's*Gitanjali*, as its case study, attempts to show how Yeats traced in Tagore's *Gitanjali* those cultural elements that have been associated by the Orientalist discourse with the Occident/West. Thus this paper will demonstrate how to Yeats, contrary to the Orientalist discourse, both the Oriental and the Occidental culture are organically and internally same.

Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali*, entitled *Song Offerings* and introduced by William Butler Yeats, was published by Macmillan, London, in March 1913. Yeats's '*Introduction*' to Tagore's *Gitanjali* which contains one hundred and three short lyrics is of immense significance. In his "*Introduction*" to Tagore's *Gitanjali*, he has acknowledged that the lyrics that are in *Gitanjali* are the product of a superior culture and they are profoundly speculative like the masterpieces of the West. In them he found the disclosure of the same philosophical and cultural world which is generally found in the masterpieces of the West: "The work of a supreme culture, they yet appear much the growth of the common soil as the grass and the rushes" (xiii-xiv).

In these lyrics Yeats found the presence of a unified culture that had not been vitiated by modernity and colonization and he traced the celebration of the same unified culture in Chaucer's *Troilus and Cressida* and in the works of Chaucer's predecessors. Indeed, to Yeats the Oriental cultural space, as presented by Tagore, was untainted, virginal and pristine in its purity. Moreover, putting the Oriental philosophy and culture to that high pedestal where the Orientalist discourse always placed the Occidental culture, Yeats substantially challenged the Orientalist myth of the inferiority of the Orient.

These lyrics also present the evergreen pictures of love and mysticism and the lovers, as Yeats contends, will always find their own images in these love lyrics. These lyrics preach the uniqueness of love and religious values and celebrate the value of human life. But still these exotic images are not exceptional to the Orient as the Orient is often associated by the essentialist Orientalist discourse with the exotic elements. Rather they remind him of the strange and exotic images of pre-lapserian states depicted by Rossetti and other poets of the West:

> A whole people, a whole civilization, immeasurably *strange* to us, seems to have been taken up into this imagination; and yet we are not moved because of its *strangeness*, but because we have met our own image, as though we had walked in Rossetti's willow wood, or heard, perhaps for the first time in literature, our voice as in a dream. [italics mine] (xvi-xvii).

In this way, Yeats has gone beyond the East/ West dichotomy and has not presented East as an exotic 'Other' to the West. He even acknowledged that while reading these lyrics, an abnormal kind of serenity comes upon him and he, no longer, hesitates to forsake this corporeal world and ventures towards the realm of metaphysics. These lyrics actually arouse in him an intense mood which is generally aroused by the lyrics of Blake.

But Yeats's movement beyond the Orientalist discourse comes into full view when he acknowledges the fact that the writers of the West like him revolve round the narrow world of politics and senses, but Tagore hovers in the land of spirituality which, in turn, is also the hall mark of the Indian civilization itself:

> We write long books where no page perhaps has any quality to make writing a pleasure, being confident in some general design, just as we fight and make money and fill our heads with politics all dull things in the doing while Mr. Tagore, like the Indian civilization itself, has been content to discover the soul and surrender himself to its spontaneity. He often seems to contrast his life with that of those who have lived more after our fashion, and have more seeming weight in the world, and always humbly as though he were only sure his way is best for him. (xx).

Here Yeats, actually, acknowledges the riches of the Oriental culture and goes beyond the typical egoistic attitude of the white men who regarded the Occident as the only and real source of light, civilization and culture. The stark contrast between the Occident and the Orient finds expressions here in the contrast between the mottos of the contemporary Occidental writers- "fight and make money"- and the motto of Tagore "discover the soul". In fact, these lyrics provided Yeats with the true essence of the Oriental culture which is akin to the Occidental culture of the bygone ages and the Oriental culture, as Yeats perceives, even surpasses the Occidental culture in some dimensions. Furthermore, as shadows of the first world-war were round the corner and human beings were fast losing their humanity, Yeats found in these lyrics the healing sprays of consolation and love. Thus the Oriental culture and philosophy offered him a haven from the conflict-ridden outside world in which the black shadows of the impending first world-war loomed large. In the words of Jayati Gupta, "With the shadows of an impending World War gathering its cumulative fury, these poems encapsulated a simple faith in man and divinity, a refuge from the crass materialism that was engulfing the world" ("Whose Gitanjali is it Anyway?", (web)). These profoundly speculative lyrics were all about the union of the Individual Self and the Universal Self and, thereby, they opened the eyes of Yeats to the Oriental spirituality. Being enlightened by this type of spiritual insight, Yeats found in these lyrics a refuge from the contemporary Ireland that was fragmented by the parochial sectarian politics between the two religious sects, Protestants and the Catholics. To quote Joseph Lenon, "For Yeats, however, Tagore's spiritual poetry meant more than a fresh expression of the spiritual, it was an avenue to avoid the claptrap of established European religions, particularly the schisms between Catholicism and Protestantism" (153).

Thus Yeats realized that Tagore though spatially belongs to the Orient, but was a spokesman of the whole world. To Yeats actually, Tagore 'was a world citizen not because he became world-famous but because he felt with the world…' (Kripalani 267). In this way, Yeats has not presented 'Orient' as a cultural contestant of the 'Occident' which is one of the recurring image of the other in the Orientalist discourse. Actually, he has not presented the Occident as an actor and Orient as the mere silent spectator of this acting performance; rather he has subverted this actor/spectator relationship. He has shown that the East and the West do not share any binary relationship, but they are the different sides of the same cultural coin and each can sustain and nourish the other. In other words, Yeats perceived the real essence of the Oriental culture and realized that it is akin to the Occidental culture or a mere copy of the Occidental culture in several dimensions. To quote Joseph Lennon "Yeats was not merely interested in building mystical or allegorical bridges; he saw these cultures as having the same cultural roots" (152). In fact, Yeats fostered "an inclusive, rather than an exclusive understanding of culture, characterized by differences" (Nordin et al x).

Yeats has also placed the essentiality of the Orientalist discourse under his strong challenge in another significant dimension. Unlike the Orientalists who had not acknowledged any trace of individuality for the human beings living in the East and presented them as people goaded by emotions and instincts or "representative of some earlier moment in evolutionary history or some primordial human trait" (Huggan, Graham and Helen Tiffin143), Yeats has shown that they also had their choice, intellect and individuality of their own. Here he has bestowed encomiums on the Tagore family as he came to know how each and every member of that family excelled in their respective intellectual domain:

> He then told me of Mr. Tagore's family and how for generations great men have come out of its cradles. "Today," he said, "there are Gogonendranath and Abanindranath Tagore, who are artists; and Dwijendranath, Rabindranath's brother, who is a great philosopher (xi).

In this way, Yeats moved beyond the rigid Orientalist discourse that is marked by a radical fragmentation between the Orient and the Occident and envisaged of a global cultural uniformity and cultural transactions between the Orient and the Occident. In a nutshell, Yeats's "Introduction" to Tagore's *Gitanjali* bids farewell to the Orientalist discourse and gives a clarion call to the Orientalists to have to a fresh look at the Orient which just like the Occident "is characterized by heterogeneity rather than by homogeneity" (Hinz, Catherina and Isolde Kurz 361). However, Yeats was not the only Westerner who realized this uniqueness of the Oriental culture. Actually, as the wide gap between the West and the East decreased considerably from the 19th century owing to radical changes in the field of communication and commercial relations between them increased, the intellectuals from the West became acquainted with the ideas of the East. Resultantly, they moved beyond the East/ West or the Orient/ Occident binary and perceived the underlying similarity between them.

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‘Cast a Cold Eye’: Re-visiting Tagore-Yeats Relationship

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The relationship between Rabindranath Tagore and W. B. Yeats, with its varying shades and complex character, is perhaps the most important instant of literary comradeship in the last century. Their interaction, respect and admiration for each other, and the final mysterious breach between them have immense cultural, historical and political significance.

Yeats was almost forty-seven when he came in contact with Tagore, then an obscure figure from Far East under western eyes. As Yeats had an inclination to supernaturalism, mysticism and spiritualism, he was easily moved by the simple and spiritually submissive tone of the poems of *Gitanjali*. On 10th July, 1912, presiding over the a private dinner arranged by India Society in England in honour of Tagore, Yeats solemnly declared that one of the greatest events of his artistic life was taking a major part to make the world familiar with this great poet from India. Three days ago (7th July) Yeats had heard Tagore’s recitation from *Gitanjali*for the first time in his life (Sengupta 85). On 10th September, 1912, he sent the much celebrated ‘Introduction’ to the*Gitanjali* to Rothenstein, where he fabulously chronicled his admiration for those poems written in simple English prose-style. Yeats was enthusiastic about Tagore: he made an unsuccessful attempt to give him membership of the Royal Society of Literature, he wanted to stage *The Post Office* in Dublin Theatre, he was so possessive of *Gitanjali* that slight changes in those poems suggested by Andrews enraged him, and after reading Tagore’s poems he finally he declared:

> I know of no man in my time who has done anything in the English language to equal these lyrics. Even as I read them in these literal prose translations, they are as exquisite in style as in thought. (Mitra 31)

Spending his time in England and America, Tagore returned to India on 27th September, 1913; and the news of conferring of the Nobel Prize on him was spread all over the world on 14th November that year. Instantly a rumor spread that Yeats had translated those poems of *Gitanjali* on behalf of Tagore, for which Tagore was being credited. One of the justifications of this rumor was that Tagore always unequivocally flaunted his inadequacy of writing in English: “I worked with Yeats and I am sure the magic of his pen helped my English to attain some quality of permanence…” (Bhattacharya 117). Secondly, an English journalist named Valentine Chirol, with pure imperialistic mould of mind, endorsed this rumour perhaps to flame the fire of communalism. Actually the undermining of Tagore’s reputation was intended only to encourage the so-called ‘Muslim’ sentiment (Mitra 35).

Tagore was annoyed; Yeats remained silent. In 1914 Yeats requested Tagore to give the right of translating from his collection of poems *The Gardener* into French to Iseult Gonne, the daughter of Maud Gonne—the lady of Yeats’s desire. Tagore, uncertain about Iseult’s linguistic ability, left the decision for Yeats’s consideration. However, as time passed, Yeats started being gradually disappointed with the standard of Tagore’s English poems; but he was charmed by *My Reminiscences*—the translation of Tagore’s *Jibansmriti* from Bengali to English by Surendranath Tagore. A letter written by Yeats to Macmillan reveals that in spite of his utter disappointment with Tagore’s English poems, he never lost faith in his poetic abilities which, according to him, found perfect expression in his Bengali poems (Mitra 23). Being requested by Rothenstein to write about Tagore for *The Golden Book of Tagore*, Yeats wrote a letter to Tagore confessing that he was still his obedient student and admirer (Sengupta 95). On that occasion, he also described his admiration for Tagore's recent prose works: *Reminiscences* and *The Home and the World*. But, interestingly, Yeats continued to criticize Tagore's English poems; he even blamed Macmillan for publishing them, except *Gitanjali*, *The Gardener*, *Crescent Moon*, some of his plays and *Sadhana*. In his controversial letter to Macmillan in 1917 he also claimed that he had thoroughly revised the poems of *Gitanjali* before publication, though this claim has later been discarded by Sourindra Mitra in his *Khyati Akhyatir Nepothye* (1977).

On the other hand, Tagore kept his faith on Yeats whom he considered to be one of the fittest men to edit his volume of collected poems in English. In 1934 he requested Amiya Chakraborty to consult him before publishing that volume (Tagore 117). Tagore himself was of the view that the English poems published by him after getting the Nobel Prize suffered from lack of vigour and artistic vitality. His evaluation of his own poems was not far from that of Yeats.

The relationship between these two great poets of the last century is shrouded with mystery with some questions still remaining unanswered. What was Tagore's perception about Yeats's poetic enterprise? He wrote about Yeats as the man of imagination, but remained silent about Yeats the poet (Tagore, RR: 670). Was there any influence of Tagore on Yeats's poetry? In a letter written to Rothenstein Yeats confessed about Tagore's influence on him: "I find Tagore and you are a great inspiration in my own art" (Mitra 67). Even, some of his poems had distant references to the poems of *Gitanjali* in their images, symbols and simplicity of language. Sourindra Mitra considers "A Coat", a poem written by Yeats, to be modeled on Tagore's poem no. 7 in *Gitanjali* (Mitra 67). It is also interesting to note that Yeats's poems took a radical turn from ornamentation to simplicity, both in form and content, just after his historical meeting with Tagore.

When Tagore and Yeats met each other, their motherlands—India and Ireland—were struggling against British colonial force and both of them were involved—actively or intellectually—with this struggle. Tagore's engagement with anti-colonial struggle of India is a much debated issue as he never remained consistent in his ideological support for it: at first, he participated in direct political activism against the British rule, but gradually, being disappointed with the violent outcome of nationalist activities, he withdrew himself from this movement and concentrated in "a constructive programme for self-empowerment" (Bhattacharya 94). His attempt to form a different cultural identity for India perhaps impressed Yeats who himself was in search of cultural consolidation of Ireland, which was only possible through a vigorous cultural revival. Yeats's impassionate involvement with ancient Irish myths and folklores gave a tremendous impetus to it. Tagore noticed it admirably. Establishing Irish National Theatre, writing poetic plays with highly nationalist fervor (*Cathleen ni Houlihan*), collecting and editing Irish folklores were Yeats's quintessential attempts for reviving cultural identity of Ireland. In this context, Tagore's poems, as collected in *Gitanjali*, suddenly opened up a new space for meditative attempt for spiritual emancipation which broadened the frame of so-called mainstream English poetic practice. In a way, Tagore's poems were an unintended departure from contemporary English poetic conventions; and the freshness of poetic idioms, simple images, almost Biblical and sermon-like expressions drew Yeats's attention. The poems of *Gitanjali* and their world-wide recognition were seen as cultural resistance against the British colonial constructivism by Yeats who hailed Tagore as greater than any of the contemporary English poet.

Yeats gradually stopped praising Tagore after the conferring of Nobel Prize on him in 1913. Surprisingly, he remained silent after this unexpected achievement of this collection of poems, the much celebrated 'Introduction' of which he himself had penned. The reason behind this silence is purely a subject of speculation as no clear evidence is left with us. Yeats started articulating his aversion for the later poems of Tagore published in English. Apart from the personal accusation of jealousy, we think that this unexpected and yet unexplained breach between these two friends can be seen as an inevitable phenomenon, forced to take place by the changing political and social scenario of India, Ireland and over the entire world. Though Yeats was a nationalist at heart, he distanced himself from direct political activism because of the violence and extremism involved with it. Though his political engagement reminds us of Tagore's deliberate rejection of extreme nationalism, we should remember their differences, too, when Tagore never returned to direct politics, Yeats was appointed as a Senator in Free Irish State in 1922. He believed in state and never criticized nationalism like Tagore. Michael North briefly traces Yeats's ideological transformation thus: "…from the socialism he briefly embraced under Morris' influence to the cultural nationalism of the Irish Literary Revival and then to militant aristocratic conservatism and finally fascism." (North 73). On the other hand, Tagore was a staunch critic of nationalism—the ideology is severely rejected by him in his lectures collected in the book *Nationalism* (1917). Tagore unequivocal rejection of this essentially western ideology failed to gain ideological support from many of the intellectuals with western origin. Perhaps Yeats was among them.

Yeats needed Tagore to strengthen his project of glorifying the indigenous and pre-colonial culture, and most importantly, projecting what is *not* essentially British. Tagore's poems helped him to shape his own poetical idioms, too. Critics are of the view that the simple and direct linguistic treatment of *Gitanjali* had left some definite impression of Yeats's later poems (Mitra 67). A detailed intertextual study can prove how Tagore offered Yeats a model to resist the claim of Western Modernism, as, according to Michael North, "Being Modern was not part of Yeats's program in poetry or in politics." (North 21). But after two or three years Tagore's poems failed to draw his appreciation as he no more needed them. Moreover, Tagore's political stance failed to gain his ideological support. After a long period of ten or fifteen years Yeats again praised Tagore—not his poems, but prose. The situation changed; and Yeats also had overcome his excitement of discovering alternative voice in Tagore. Now what he needed was not poetical explorations of the Unknown, but logical observation of this mundane and prosaic world. When Yeats died in 1939 Tagore wrote in *Hindusthan Standard* (31st January, 1939) that Yeats, with his classical height, has successfully gained a permanent place in history of literature (Sengupta 101). From Tagore's famous essay *Kobi Yeats* (Yeats—the Poet) written in 1912, it is not clear whether Tagore loved Yeats's poems, but undoubtedly Tagore's poems were at first praised by Yeats, and then were attacked by him because of their alleged lack of vitality and technical finesse. What I have tried to say is that this sudden change of taste was not a matter of purely literary concern but rather had some cultural and political overtones.

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Yeats’s Connection with India : A Re-evaluation from Postcolonial Perspective

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W. B. Yeats (1865-1939) was a poet who found himself in a peculiar situation. He was an Irish who lived in England and wrote in English; he was a mystic who engaged himself in anti-colonial movement; a man who heavily borrowed from other notable visionaries yet developed his own ‘system’ and a modernist who, despite being well aware of the fragmented nature of experience in contemporary times, sought to achieve ‘unity of being’. His lifelong quest for spiritual fulfillment and his excessive interest in the occult ultimately had drawn him to the Theosophic Society and then to Rabindranath Tagore. It is well known that he was enchanted in his youth by Mohini Mohan Chatterjee, a representative of the Theosophic Society and later by Tagore and is believed to have played a pivotal role in Tagore’s winning of the Noble Prize in 1913 by writing the introduction to *Gitanjali.* But despite his early fascination, Yeats was bored with Tagore in the later phase of his life. So one may ask why was Yeats fascinated by Chatterji and Tagore and why had he drifted away from them? Is there any connection between Yeats’ overall philosophy and the Eastern spiritualism? What has Yeats’ position as a colonized but European writer got to do with his connection with India?

In his youth Yeats was attracted to a number of spiritual organizations such as Dublin Hermetic Order, the Golden Dawn etc. In 1888 he joined the Theosophic Society whose mysticism appealed to him because it was a form of imaginative life far removed from the mundane daily life. The esoteric philosophy of the society provided him a world in which he could feed on his own fascination for occultism as well as develop his theory of the ‘Mask’. In his early youth Yeats was taught by his father that personal utterance is egoism and hence, even for a lyric poet, the experiences should be rendered in poetry in objective and dramatic manner. This realization led Yeats to formulate that we make poetry out of conflict with ourselves . This personal conflict was manifested in Yeats very early, as he was a shy, solitary and dreamer by nature, but desired to be a man of action to fulfill his nationalistic ambition and to prove himself worthy of his lady-love Maud Gonne. Yeats was continually excited by dramatic qualities of great men and certain philosophies and attempted to incorporate them into his personality a kind of psychological compensation to reinforce his success or justify his failure. He wrote in his *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* – “If we cannot imagine ourselves as different from what we are, and try to assume that second self, we cannot impose a discipline upon ourselves though we may accept one from others. Active virtue, as distinguished from the passive acceptance of a code, is therefore theatrical, consciously dramatic, the wearing of a mask…”. R. Henn’s observation on this duality in Yeats is relevant here:

> His personality thus oscillated, as it were, between the poles of opposing aspects of personality; one the seeming, the present, the other the wished for, which could , at moments, appear to be justified in action … He could exploit the image of the swordsman, and take fencing lessons, and justify the opposition, in himself, of the swordsman and the saint. (*The Lonely Tower*, 36-7)

As a result of this, Yeats sought ‘the last knowledge’ , a kind of mystic receptiveness in which all knowledge comes from God. His acquaintance with Mohini Chatterjee ignited his imagination towards Hinduism which seemed to him to be a guide for the peace of soul in the age of materialistic pursuit of the West. Dissatisfied as he was with the Western madness for power and material comfort, and identifying himself as colonized by the British as the Indians were, he developed a romantic idea of India and its practices. Unconsciously perhaps, he became an orientalist. In his poems such as “The Indian to His Love” and “The Indian upon God” his depiction of India as a land of perfect peace and tranquility is the reproduction of his orientalist fantasy. “The Indian upon God” presents India such a land where everybody conceives God in his own image; to the moorfowl God is an undying moorfowl, to the lotus God is a huge lotus with ‘His petals wide’. In “The Indian to His Love” the generic Indian lover invites his ladylove to live with him in an exotic island paradise where “great boughs drop tranquility”:

> Here we will moor our only ship
> And wander ever with woven hands,
> Murmuring softly lip to lip
> Along the grass, along the sands,
> Murmuring how far away the unquiet lands:

This is not real India, but a romanticized account of a Westerner who looked upon the East as place of magic and occult, where the Pre-Raphaelitic simplicity of life was accompanied by all-peace-to-be-had mysticism. This is the Westerner’s fantasy of the Orient, a fabricated construct, a series of images that come to stand as the orient’s reality for those in the West. One is reminded of Edward Said:

> …the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West. (*Orientalism*, 5)

It is true that Mohini Chatterjee’s lectures on *The Bhagwat Geeta* and Vedantism of Samkara influenced him so deeply in his early youth that he tried to find solutions of the metaphysical questions of life through the ancient Indian Philosophy as is demonstrated in the poems like “The Song of the Happy Shepherd”, “Kanva on himself”, “Ephemera”, “Mogan Thinks of His Past Greatness” etc. Yeats learnt from Chatterjee the multi-dimensionality of human personality and realized that “Men dance on deathless feet” as he says in the poem “Mohini Chatterjee”. But gradually Yeats’ infatuation with India is replaced by his concern for Irish nationalism. He accepted the words of Mohini Chatterjee and *The Bhagwat Geeta* but not the spirit. While tracing the resemblance between Yeats’ lyrical *drama Anashuya and Vijaya* and Kalidasa’s *Shakuntala*, Dr. Suman Sing contends:.

> However, Yeats is unable to create the Indian atmosphere. The reason for this is that Yeats’ characters in the play do not act or think according to Indian values. There are several instances in the play where the behavior of Anashuya or Vijaya does not conform to Indian values. The reason for this is the fact that Yeats learnt about Indian Culture from a far distance. (‘Mohini Mohan Chatterji’s Influence on W. B. Yeats’,7)

The same kind of romantic idealization is also evident in Yeats’ relation with Tagore. When Rothenstein first introduced to him the prose rendering of *Gitanjali*, he was simply carried away as if he had found something he had long cherished for. Yeats’ immediate fascination for Tagore’s verses may have been for two reasons: his longing for oriental mysticism and his identification with Tagore as a poet of country colonized by the British. Yeats met Tagore on 7 July, 1912. It was the period when his nationalistic zeal was very high. Troubled as he was by the imbroglio of the time, the songs of *Gitanjali* struck him as the epitome of Eastern wisdom. He found in them what he could not find in Europe. The result is his elevation of Tagore to mythic height as is amply demonstrated in his famous introduction to *Gitanjali.* After acknowledging to the point of embarrassment in public places, that the *Gitanjali* lyrics often moved him , Yeats wrote:

> These lyrics…display in their thought a world I have long dreamed of all my life long. The work of a supreme culture. . . A tradition, where poetry and religion are the same thing, has passed through the centuries, gathering from learned and unlearned metaphor and emotion, and carried back again to the multitude the thought of the scholar and of the noble. (*Gitanjali*, 9-10)

This is not only introducing an oriental sage in the West, but also ‘mythologizing the mystic’ as it has been contended by Malcom Sen:

> …like a teenage love affair, Yeats’ fascination with Tagore was intense but short-lived, it is not only a commentary on cross-cultural encounters within the British colonial world but also

> exemplary of western conceptions of the Orient…India, sieved through Tagore's poetry, appeared to Yeats as everything that he had expected it to be: enamoured of the mystical, and supporting a tradition where poetry and religion were the same thing. ('Mythologising a 'mystic':W. B. Yeat on the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore', 3)

Yeats' enchantment with Tagore did not last long because one cannot continually dote on something whose essence one cannot feel. Yeats may have been a mystic, but Tagore really was an intellectual polymath, not merely a spiritual poet. Thus, Yeats' misunderstanding of Tagore's writing is in itself a commentary on the Western attitudes towards the East.

The Irish poet identified India, as did other orientalists, as a spiritual storehouse whose ambiguity-laden philosophy would, in the end, be amenable to the strictures of western pragmatism. Thus came Yeats' disenchantment with Tagore, as is observed by Sen – "Surprisingly, Yeats would admonish Tagore years later for the very religiosity that he had initially found admirable. "He speaks too much about God", Yeats said, and further clarified that

> My mind resents the vagueness of such references … I have fed upon the philosophy of the Upanishads all my life, but there is an aspect of Tagore's mysticism that I dislike. I find absence of tragedy in Indian poetry.

Yeats was a crucial figure in the Celtic Revival through which he, along with Lady Gregory, J. M. Synge and others, tried to create a distinctive Irish literature as a way of resistance to British imperialism. While identifying Yeats as an anti-colonial poet who prophetically perceived the 'need to balance violent force with an exigent political and organizational process' for decolonization , Said also has observed:

> For Yeats the overlapping he knew existed of his Irish nationalism and the English cultural heritage, which both dominated and empowered him, was bound to cause tension, and one may speculate that it was the pressure of his urgently political and secular tension that caused him to try to resolve it on a 'higher', that is, non-political level. (*Culture and Imperialism*, 273)

Thus, Yeats was ultimately the product of the English or in a broader sense, the European cultural heritage. He may look to the East to find something magical, something which will reconcile the opposites; but his consciousness remained saturated with the British literature and European civilizations, especially the ancient Classical one. This is not to say that he hated Eastern civilizations; rather, despite being sympathetic to India for its mysticism as well as its colonized status, he could not come out of his 'Eurocentric' cultural heritage. He may have helped Tagore to bag the coveted prize, but did he do it for the right reasons?

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“(T)hat shell’s elaborate whorl”: The Sound of the Occult in Yeats’s “Crazy Jane” Poems

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> *“(I)f we make it possible again for the poet to express himself, not merely through words, but through the voices of singers, of minstrels, of players, we shall certainly have changed the substance and the manner of our poetry”* (*Collected Works* 106).

One of the most experimental and novel features of Yeats’s poetics was his intent to revolutionize the nature of poetic expression by an increased emphasis on sounds. Inspired by the Irish culture of orality, he regarded the tone of words as crucial to their meaning as to their literary definition. Consequently, he wrote poems for the purpose of being sung by modern minstrels, which he presented within his anthology *Words for Music Perhaps*.

In order to create the perfect form to represent the “spirit” of his poetry, Yeats attempted to connect with the Irish past through séances, the art of conversing with ghosts, in which communication was completely limited to the sounds of their voices. As his fascination with both the ghostly and sound systems colluded, he was inspired to recreate his occult invocations of the ancient minstrels within his poetry. This article focuses on the voices and tones in the anthology *Words for Music Perhaps*, and more specifically, on the “Crazy Jane” poems.

The first work in this sequence is “Crazy Jane and the Bishop”, which introduces tonal concepts that are continued in the later poems. The poem presents two different types of voices, separated only through the length and accentuation of the vowels they feature. The first instance of this duplicity of tone can be found in the imperfect rhyme between “tomb” and “coxcomb”. While the fact that both words finish with the same combination of letters suggests a rhyme between them, this turns out to be an illusion, since reading the poem aloud announces the tonal discrepancy between the syllables. This effect is caused by the elongation of the vowel “o” in “tomb”, contrasting the short vowels in “coxcomb”. As a result, the former creates a haunting echo that lingers over the sounds to follow.

“Tomb” is both orally and contextually separated from the rest of the poetic language through its placement within the bracketed line “All find safety in the tomb”. The speaker of this line proposes a broad statement about the afterlife, whereby his/her confidence in the truthfulness of the testimony is evoked through the presence of a full stop instead of a question mark at the end of the line. Designation of voice is often unclear in Yeats’s “Crazy Jane” poems, and here we find the first example of this: The line could be spoken either by the dead Jack, since he has personal experience with the afterlife, or the bishop who claims to possess knowledge of a “heavenly mansion” which awaits the blessed after death.

Here, Yeats leaves it to our interpretation and recognition of sounds to determine the identity of the bracketed voice. The line “The solid man and the coxcomb” is allocated to the Bishop, as Jane claims that this was his last description of Jack; this “was the last he said”. “Coxcomb” functions as a cacophony, juxtaposing the harsh consonants “c” and “x”, whereby it stands in direct contrast to the euphony within the word “tomb”. This difference in voice tone subsequently suggests that the two lines are worded by different people, deliberately contrasted by their manner of speaking. The illusion of a rhyme scheme further opposes the short vowel sound of the Bishop's description and the lasting sound the elongated "o" in "tomb" creates. This contrast of longitude is then possibly an indication that Jack's voice and his teachings about the afterlife might outlast the defamations of the Bishop.

The intentional elongation of carefully picked vowels serves to distort the separation between the past and the present. For example, the Bishop's "ban" is dominated by the short, mute consonant "b", whereas the "ou" in "Journeyman" is elongated. Hereby, Yeats implies that Jack's journey proceeds for longer than the power of the Bishop's ban, which reverses nominal power dynamics and allows the influence of the dead to exceed the one of the living. With disembodiment, Jack's presence expands, as language traces an outline around a once solid form, which creates an uncanny discrepancy between the strength of the present voice and its formlessness. When the poem is then read aloud, the howling sounds of Jack's voice, created through the elongated vowels of "tomb", "Journey" and "oak" suggest the powerful and lasting nature of a ghostly presence to the reader's subconscious. Therein, past and present are intermixed: While Jack "had" Jane's virginity when he was still alive, even after death he "bids me to the oak". As Jane's use of the present tense prevents his voice from being misinterpreted as a memory, it is capable of audibly appearing in the present. By the time Yeats wrote "Crazy Jane and the Bishop" he had already been intensely engaged in broadcasting with the BBC (Morin 3), whereby he was confronted with disembodied voices, recorded in the past, but appearing in the present. Yeats's work with the BBC inspired him to include hauntingly discarnate voices into poetry, and, faithful to the nature of radio, to demarcate them only by the sounds they produce.

However, in his poetic sequence Yeats also introduces such reverberant voices as haunting presences within objects, whereby the reader is alluded to the presence of occult workings within every part of the world. For instance the shell and, more generally, the ocean in "Crazy Jane Reproved" produce sounds which allow them a representative function as symbols for Yeats's philosophy. Firstly, the "elaborate whorl" of the shell features a long vowel, which emphasizes the temporally elongated quality inherent in the process of "whorling". As "whorling" describes a movement in a twisted and convoluted fashion, the word's meaning is very closely related to the more commonly used "whirling". However, the rhyme between "whorl" and "rol" emphasizes the vowel "o". The repetition of this vowel recalls Jack's ghostly howls, which alerts the reader to the potential of disembodied presences existing within this whorl, echoing throughout the poem's rhyme scheme. As "whorl" describes a twisted movement, it is then possible to argue that its motion describes the same intermixing of the living and the dead, and the present and the past that has been identified in the previous poem.

The voices of the living and the dead are constantly overlapping in "Crazy Jane Reproved": The voices of the sailors haunt the poem from its past, since they may have been killed by the "storm that blots the day", however they prompt Jane to claim, in the present tense, that she does not care what they say. The fact that Jane replies to them, in spite of the absence of their physical bodies, indicates that their unrepeated statement still haunts her consciousness. Thereby, the absence of the sailors' bodies and the unresolved question of their statements' content create an uncanny vacuum, overpowering the poem's present. Once more, a lack of body thereby seemingly grants the speaker power over the living and the different states are intermixed in an "elaborate whorl". As the poetic sequence continues, the separation between life and death is increasingly ill-defined, whereby, as Luftig recognizes, it becomes more and more unclear that, for instance, Jack's life has already ended or that Jane's death has not already begun. Instead, the lack of a clear definition of death can lead only to further "wandering" (1130).

In his poetry, the ocean's tides themselves describes these movements between the living and the dead, since it is moved by the gravitational force of the moon, a celestial body, Yeats saw as responsible for all of life's developments (Carberg 144). Bohlmann describes how Yeats is influenced by Nietzsche in seeing the world as "a sea of forces" in relentless strife engendered by conflicting wills to power, creating a "continuous ebb and flow" of birth and death. Yeats's double to Nietzsche's conflicting forces are his gyres that influence life in their overlapping area, while they themselves are controlled by the moon phases. Thereby they create a "sea of forces", through which life and death could then be thrown together. In this poem, Yeats thus uses the symbols of shell and ocean to propose that the influence of the moon phases is accountable for creating this intermixing of ghosts and the living.

The sounds "Fol de rol", which form the poem's refrain, can thus be argued to recreate the sound of the waves in mapping the growing and declining influence of the moon phases. As the poem simultaneously recounts the ghostly presences of the dead by repeating the elongated vowel "o", this refrain constantly draws attention to the prevailing influence of the dead over the present. This function becomes especially obvious if one considers that in an earlier version of the poem, the line was spelled "Foll de roll" (*Words for Music Perhaps,* 337). Since the double consonant used in this spelling shortens the sound of the vowel, Yeats changed the spelling. This explicates that the increasingly haunting elongation of the "o" in the refrain is intentionally included.

Such chant-like repetitive sounds more generally echo Yeats's belief in reincarnation, which he expresses, for instance, in "Crazy Jane and Jack the Journeyman": "My body in the tomb/ Shall leap into the light lost/ In my mother's womb". The speaker here describes how his or her body will be reborn, whereby the elongated vowels in especially "t**o**mb" and "w**o**mb" (my emphasis) imply that this knowledge is bestowed upon the reader by a ghostly voice that has knowledge of life beyond the grave. Similarly, "Crazy Jane Reproved" can be argued to describe the never-ending development of human lives: the living and the dead are intermixed through the growing and declining influences of the moon phases, until the living are dead and the dead are reincarnated, so that the pattern can start again.

The reason Yeats would choose to convey his teachings in symbolic likenesses concealed within sound systems lies in his belief that "Man can embody truth but he cannot know it" (*Letters* 922). In "Crazy Jane on the Day of Judgement", Yeats makes it clear that "(a)ll could be known or shown/ If Time were but gone", whereby he expresses the idea that among the dead on the Day of Judgement everyone's knowledge can be shared, while beforehand it could only "remain in God". In fact, Yeats did not believe in god per se, but in a god-like figure he entitled "Anima Mundi", which was joined to the "Great Memory" and attuned to the collective unconscious (Gerould 85). In this *Anima Mundi* everyone's memories, thoughts and knowledge remain, whereby it embodies the "truth" of human existence. However, through claiming that "(a)ll things remain in God" Yeats makes it clear that "the truth" is not accessible to humans. He himself thus struggled to systematize his occult explanation of the world's history, entitled *A Vision,* through using almost exclusive metaphors, symbols and images (Carberg 141): only through such referents was it possible for him to refer back to an unreachable truth.

It thus becomes clear how intricate the soundscape within Yeats's poetry truly is, and how much meaning he assigns to it particularly in his "Crazy Jane" poems. Through letting his occult convictions influence the presentation of his art to such a degree, Yeats presents himself as a curious mixture between a modern and a Romantic artist. While he expresses traits of Romanticism in presenting a unified philosophy on the workings of the world, he achieves this by employing a system of seemingly fragmented sounds. By using techniques such as coding, patterns and symbolism which became fashionable in the modernist period, and by not explicitly enunciating his occult dogmas within the wording of his poems, Yeats retained his position as a modernist writer, whilst still faithfully representing the essence of his all-encompassing beliefs.

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From Bethlehem to Byzantium: Utopian Journey of Yeats

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The concept of "utopia," popularized in English literature by Sir Thomas More during the Renaissance, had been a romantic refuge across subsequent generations which speculate on its all-encompassing sense of comfort and justice. Utopia has been synonymous to such notions as mirth, hope, justice and other positive qualities. Whether utopia is a realizable concept is a matter of debate, but the speculative mind of the artist associates ideals of joys and happiness unattained in mundane life. The unfulfilled aspirations and unconscious passions of the artist find manifestation in the idyllic world called utopia. Fátima Vieira notes that utopia has been historically defined with four parameters: the content of an imagined society, or a "good place"; the literary form into which the utopian imagination has been crystallized; the function of utopia, or the impact that it causes on its reader; and the desire for a better life, caused by a feeling of discontentment towards the society one lives in (6). After being neglected in the Neo-classical period whose extreme reasoning failed to appreciate the poetic possibilities of utopic contemplation, the concept of utopia was reinstated to its former glory in the Romantic Period. The romantic poets who placed imagination above reason delightfully embraced and celebrated the hopeful, jocund mood of utopia which offered the pining subjects a place to unleash their emotion sans sorrow, fever and fret.

Yeats was a romantic at heart who disliked the dominance of reason and preferred imagination instead. He drew on the fertile Irish legends, magic, myths and superstitions to enrich his poems. Yeats' interest in an esoteric occult knowledge that relates to a utopic idealism can be found in such poems as "The Second Coming," "Sailing to Byzantium" and "Byzantium" which also function as a search for a utopic place—a place of refuge from the unnerving scenario of war-torn, materialistic, disillusioning twentieth century. Byzantium is a fabled land which, notwithstanding its history of being attacked by various forces in successive periods, is believed to be the centre of medieval cult of Arts in Europe which retained its superiority for centuries. However, the final fall of Constantinople by the Ottoman Turks in the year 1453 led to the dispersal of the Byzantine scholars throughout Europe who carried with them the finest cultural treasures associated with Byzantium. The pagan tradition of Byzantium became a matter of immense interest during the Renaissance and it was believed to be a magic place full of enchanting objects. While occultism that characterizes Byzantium heightened the interest of Christian scholars who coupled it with dark arts, the artistic superiority and material affluence of Byzantium became a matter of conjecture and imagination of the artists.

The first reference to a distinct utopic location apart from the Christian land of salvation can be identified in "The Second Coming," which was published in *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921). The poem is also Yeats' introduction of an imaginative ideal into the world which comes to fruition and completion in his Byzantium poems. Yeats is aware that any creation is violent and must bear some memory of the violent enunciation (for example, the image of a *Spiritus Mundi*). The second, extended stanza of the poem gives an indication of a utopic vision towards its very end, through the image of a rocking cradle:

> The darkness drops again; but now I know
> That twenty centuries of stony sleep
> Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
> And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
> Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born? ("The Second Coming")

The re-creation of life in the form of the immense apparition that is evinced as a second coming moves towards Bethlehem with a utopia of possibilities. However, Yeats is also aware that the utopic imagination pertaining to Bethlehem and cannot be realized. Yeats' loss of faith in the cradle of Christianity for a new Renaissance and a respite from the arduous conditions of their present history is apparent. Terence Brown suggests, "a new age coming to birth cannot escape the violence of a terrible parturition, nor the fear of what is to come to term—strange and incomprehensible as it must be to contemporary thought and feeling" (441). Yeats' ideal of salvation is, again, two-fold—one pagan and another Christian. If the later Byzantium poems are replete with pagan elements, "The Second Coming" presents an unmistakable Christian imagery. The image of a rocking cradle here recalls the promise of Christ of a second coming for the purgation of men's sinfulness. But the imagery is an occult one, anticipating the nature of the Byzantium poems, where the promised birth vexes the generations of sleep and indifference. Here the image of the unborn is more frightening than that of the dead—but it too is expected to kill the half-dead men of modern society so that a new birth can take place with all the promises of a reincarnated civilization. Yeats dreams of another utopia but seeks it at a great risk.

The Byzantium poems are Yeats' expression of a tacit understanding and response against the mutability of mortal lives. Indeed the volume, *The Tower* (1928) is replete with poems that possess such spirit as he shows in "Sailing to Byzantium." Utopia is thus the innate desire in the poet's mind—not a mythical place away from home, but a possibility to transcend the existing delirium. This visualization of a possible and physical (Irish) utopia is necessary for Yeats who believes that "philosophy with its vision of transcendence of the material world cannot offer comfort in face of such bleak knowledge" of the harsh realities (Brown 446). Rather, it is "only an art centered in the truths of earthly, bodily existence can offer any credible alternative to the vision of personal and historical disintegration" (ibid). There is ,however, no corrosive sense of destruction in this vision that permeates a large number of Yeats' other poems, including "The Second Coming." What is in place in lieu of the sense of destruction is optimism concealed under the façade of mortal considerations , as the very first stanza testifies to:

> That is no country for old men. The young
> In one another's arms, birds in the trees
> —Those dying generations—at their song,
> The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
> Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long
> Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.
> Caught in that sensual music all neglect
> Monuments of unageing intellect. ("Sailing to Byzantium")

This is a commentary on the dystopia that Yeats witnesses around him as a regular event. The ravages of the Great War, the failure of his revolutionary ideals and the irresolution of the Irish issue are combined with Yeats' ideological turmoil. In the poem, Yeats does not propose a utopia that is severed from the realities of existence. Rather, he proposes grounding in reality of the concept that still permits the employment of idealism and imagination. The historicity of Byzantium and the Renaissance affection towards its idea are reproduced as Yeats closes his poem with an air of optimism:

> Once out of nature I shall never take
> My bodily form from any natural thing,
> But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
> Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
> To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;
> Or set upon a golden bough to sing
> To lords and ladies of Byzantium
> Of what is past, or passing, or to come. ("Sailing to Byzantium")

In his reworking of "Sailing to Byzantium" in the sequel-poem "Byzantium," published in *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1929), the conclusion has a sense of utopic vision, but the hallucination of reality has already crept in. The three-year difference between compositions of the two poems allowed for a drastic alteration in Yeats' vision. Whereas "Sailing to Byzantium" had a manifestation at times of clear optimism, "Byzantium" reveals the idea of utopia as the impossibility that Yeats now considers it to be. Among the images of violence, the third stanza is distinct in its break from mythic sources to historical realities:

> At midnight on the Emperor's pavement flit
> Flames that no faggot feeds, nor steel has lit,
> Nor storm disturbs, flames begotten of flame,
> Where blood-begotten spirits come
> And all complexities of fury leave,
> Dying into a dance,
> An agony of trance,
> An agony of flame that cannot singe a sleeve. ("Byzantium")

If a utopia exists in "Byzantium" it is in this reference of continuity. The flames appear to be indestructible as well as not destroying anything. In their appearance they resemble the eternal flames in Hell as Milton described them. However, Byzantium is not an analogy for Hell in Yeats' imagination. The terrors which Yeats deliberates on are metaphoric and solicit the idea of a utopia as the escape route, necessitating the conclusion that also features a reappearance of the Emperor's goldsmiths from "Sailing to Byzantium":

> Astraddle on the dolphin's mire and blood,
> Spirit after spirit! The smithies break the flood,
> The golden smithies of the Emperor!
> Marbles of the dancing floor
> Break bitter furies of complexity,
> Those images that yet
> Fresh images beget,
> That dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea. ("Byzantium")

The conclusion is referential to history and cultural lineage together. While Yeats cannot eschew religious symbolism entirely, nor does he purport to move away from history, he creates a plausible atmosphere where the two come together with his national sensibilities. This vision is not excessively romantic in its unbridled imagination, but responds to his reality in the most apt manner—by creating a utopia of possibilities. Yeats' vision of Byzantium is partly real, and largely utopic. It is, to him, literally and symbolically, a golden land where old and mature people of this world set forth to complete their store of knowledge. Yeats' Byzantium is also like Dante's purgatory where men are taken to a cathartic process to be purged of their earthly sins. In this sense, Byzantium is a heavenly place which is in many respects in sharp contrast to the earth where common men dwell. Yeats' utopic Byzantium is not Eliot's waste land, but a reverse of it. But his quest of an ideal land is similar to that of Eliot although the latter is evidently pessimistic in his quest of a happy land. Eliot's "hollow men" are condemned to suspire and die in the wasteland almost without any hope for betterment of their fate. But Yeats' men can undertake to discover the ideal place which would offer them salvation. What is utopic in Yeats' imagination is not purely historical nor entirely imaginative. His ideal is one which brings together the myths and cultural scaffoldings of Irish national identity with history. Instead of creating a utopia of myths and fiction, Yeats proposes one which possesses the best of the mythic as well as of the real. The remarks of Middleton Murry perhaps best summarizes Yeats' resources in his construction of a utopic imagination:

> The poet turns to myth as a foundation upon which he can explicate his imagination. He may take his myth from legend or familiar history, or he may create one for himself anew; but the function it fulfils is always the same. It supplies the elements, upon which he can build the structure of his parable, upon which he can make it elaborate enough to convey the multitudinous reactions of his soul to the world. (qtd in Brown 438)

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The Drama of Conflict in the Build-up of Unity of Being: A Study of Blake and Yeats's Poetry

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Yeats's penchant for Hinduism is quite known to the literary circle. He delved deep into unwrapping the mysteries of Universe under the impact of occult exercises. Yeats, of course, was much stimulated by Blake's theory of the progress of the soul in its constant conflict. In his approach to this project he deals with the two conflicting paraphernalia- 'soul' and 'self '(body). In the poetic oeuvre of Yeats, 'soul' is caught in its critical journey of spiritual development. In the Jainistic theory of the state of 'soul', one would find that Yeats' soul is steeped in worldliness (*Bhavaabhinanadita*), and is in the conflict between two pervasive polarities- 'soul' and 'self'. This complex march of the soul brings insight into the self-knowledge of the poet, heavily symbolizing the drama of conflict.

Yeats, inspired by Nietzsche and Blake, devised his poetics on the dialectical opposites. Nietzsche, in his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, flashed a focus on the principal concept of the "eternal return" or the "eternal recurrence", emphasizing the cyclical progress of the Universe in an infinite motion. In fact, Indian religions like Hinduism and Buddhism also stress the same ideas of the 'recurrence' of the Universe. Yeats's symbol of 'gyre' shares with the similar concept of Nietzsche. Blake's symbolic world centres on the theory of Four Zoas. Blake propounded a theory that the actual cause of man's downfall was not a sin committed against God, but it was the four Zoas of man becoming conscious of one another and falling into disharmony. These four divisions/Zoas make a clash against themselves in their fallen state to gain control over man, resultantly a chaotic state is created that strangulates man's spiritual advancement. "Blake sometimes creates a mythological world of his own. For example, the giant Los, who represents the human imagination, is set against his opposite Urizen , who represents the restrictions of law and order." (*Carter & McRae*: 204)

Yeats was much influenced by the treatment of conflicts in Blake's poetry. They are in plethora of – day and night, life and death, reason and emotion, innocence and experience and so on. Blake articulates in convincing manner his revolutionary thoughts in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. In it Blake presents, even celebrates a series of contraries – Heaven and Hell, Angel and Devil, Reason and Energy, Good and Evil and so on. In Blake's philosophical argument, evil is necessary for the good to exist. Spiritual advancement is impossible without the active engagement of the drama of contraries: "Without Contraries is no progression/Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy /Love and hate are necessary to Human existence." (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: 11-14) The forces of the opposite emotions stress the novelty of thought in both Blake and Yeats's poetry. In his masterpieces *The Songs of Innocence* and *The Songs of Experience*, Blake harps upon the theme of contraries with his greater poetic aplomb. The study of the first song of Introduction from both the collection foregrounds the unified perception of the contraries- innocence and experience. *The Introduction* from *Innocence Songs* deals with a child on a cloud who tells the piper to sit down and write songs in a book. It is the child, the innocence incarnate who inspires the piper for poetic creation, the form of beauty. So, the piper wrote:

> And I made a rural pen,
> And I stain'd the water clear,

And I wrote my happy songs
Every child may joy to hear. (*Introduction*: 23-26)

The song in *Experience* bears the same title *Introduction*. The piper now figures as a bard who sees present, past and future, and who has heard the holy word. He has now possessed a prophetic vision whose poetic genius is now converted from the simple and the divine into something very complicated. This psycho-aesthetic journey of the poet becomes more prominent in *The Lamb* in *The Songs of Innocence* and *The Tyger* in *The Songs of Experience*. *The Lamb* is composed with ease and solemnity, almost in a sing-song fashion:

Little Lamb, I'll tell thee,
Little Lamb, I'll tell thee:
He is called by thy name,
For He calls Himself a Lamb.
He is meek, and He is mild;
He became a little child.
I a child, and thou a lamb,
We are called by His name. (*The Lamb*: 31-38)

The Tyger is more difficult a poem involving complicated symbols and mysticism away from the simple rhythmic felicity in*The Lamb*. *The Tyger* is both beautiful and fearful, and thus it symbolises a blend of contraries. It has oxymoronic qualities.*The Tyger* could be contrasted well with innocence of the 'Lamb'.

Undoubtedly like Blake, Yeats developed his own poetics that reads the drama of conflicts in its aesthetic fervour. *Sailing to Byzantium* and *Byzantium*, *A Dialogue of Self and Soul, Meru, Lapis Lazuli* form an inner structure of Yeats' poetry. Aping the same track, Yeats wrote in his essay "*Poetry and Tradition*" that the 'nobleness of the arts is in the mingling of contraries, the extremity of sorrow, the extremity of joy'. Yeats transforms the actual conflicts of life into an aesthetic expression and endeavours to merge them in art. According to his philosophical mechanism expounded in *A Vision*, life is a form of two opposing gyres and labels them 'struggling states' – the primary and the antithetical tinctures. The primary tincture represents objectivity, concord, the solar, the reasonable, while the antithetical represents subjectivity, discord, the lunar, the natural beauty and the Unity of Being.

Yeats amassed his poetic energy in expressing his occult ideas and weaved them together with poetry and philosophy. *To the Rose upon the Rood of Time* brings an important concept of eternal beauty. Yeats's desire for the eternal beauty symbolized by the rose expands in *Sailing to Byzantium* . Tired of the real world that does not respect the imperishable beauty of art and literature , and dissatisfied with the transient nature of human life , the poet embraces the ancient city of Byzantium: "Yeats's poetic speakers, unable or unwilling to come terms with life within or around them flee or are summoned to … the golden boughs of Byzantium".

In other words, the rose is replaced by Byzantium. It is the reason which reigns in Byzantium prevalently, and so the poet wants a release from his embodied state. He yearns to be a golden bird eternally singing to the lords and ladies of Byzantium . The whole poem presents conflicts between the real and the ideal, the temporal and the permanent, between the mortality of human body and the immortality of human soul. In the first stanza of the poem the poet writes:

That is no country for the old men. The young

In one another's arms, birds in the trees

Those dying generations – at their song
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas
Fish, fish, or fowl, command all summer long
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.
Monuments of unageing intellects. (*Sailing to Byzantium* : 104-110)

The country referred to is Ireland, but more philosophically it is the sensual and mortal world not fit for the old men. The first stanza emphatically showcases the temporality of the poet's country through a set of romantic scenes – the young remaining in one another's arms and salmons jumping. But Byzantium does not appear to be a mere repetition of *Sailing to Byzantium* ; it reflects the more mature vision of the poet. *In Sailing to Byzantium* the city is dominated by reason, but now Yeats discovers that reason and sensuality must be fused together for a better aesthetic growth. *Byzantium*, in fact, celebrates the unified vision of the poet. Zwerdling notes: "As a result of the shift from the 'higher' faculties to the 'lower', the true Vision now seemed possible in ecstatic world." (*Zwerdling* : 90)

The first stanza of the Byzantium describes in the background of night the unpurified images of the day. The impurity, images, darkness, drunkenness, sleep, song, gong all are accumulated in the opening set-up:

The unpurged images of the day recede;
The Emperor's drunken soldiery are abed;
Night resonance recedes, night-waker's song
After great cathedral gong;
A starlit or a moonlit dome disdains
All that man is,
All mere complexities,
The fury and the mire of human veins. (*Byzantium*: 153-60)

The second stanza brings forth an image that floats. The poet is confused whether it is man or shade, shade more than man or more image than a shade. It is not a play of words, but an attempt to paint a chaotic world difficult to understand with senses. The golden bird and cocks of Hades are paradoxically juxtaposed and they create a pattern of conflict between permanent and transitory, the higher and the lower. While the golden bird symbolizes the permanence of art, cocks of Hades symbolize the transience of the embodied being.

Yeats's poetry continued to centre on the binary opposite of reason and sensibility in *Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop*which dramatizes the rudimentary conflict between body and soul. Two contrasting characters set the two distinctly opposite viewpoints of life –Bishop is an advocate of soul's superiority over body, whereas Crazy Jane celebrates the co-existence of the two in her. Bishop puts light on the separation between body and soul, and stands for the latter exhorting a woman called Crazy Jane:

Those breasts are flat and fallen now,
Those veins must soon be dry;
Live in heavevly mansion,
Not in some foul sty. (*Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop*: 104-108)

But Crazy Jane celebrates the paradox between self and soul in her being arguing that fair and foul are interrelated and complementary. Fair needs foul for its significance. Crazy Jane establishes her argument against the Bishop:

Fair and foul are of kin,
And fair needs foul', I cried.
My friends are gone, but that's a truth
Nor grave nor bed denied,
Learned in bodily lowliness
And in the heart's pride. (*Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop* : 112-117)

Yeats emphasized the importance of the material world in his poems like *A Dialogue of Self and Soul, the Hawk,* and *The Balloon of the Mind. A Dialogue of Self and Soul* externalizes the conflict between self and soul. The Japanese sword symbolizes the self; like the Japanese sword which shows the embroidery of flowers, life is tied with attachment and attraction. In *The Hawk* , the high soaring hawk symbolizes soul. The cook and scullion, the common people of earth call down the soaring hawk to assist them in the physical world .The argument is that soul must be subservient to the aid of material world.

Throughout his literary career Yeats was in search of Unity of Being, an aesthetic experience in which mystic felicity comes from reconciliation of the opposites through poetry. In a world where "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold", the search for Unity of Being has led the poet to his own spiritual renewal. *An Acre of Grass*, one of his last poems, reflects his efforts for his spiritual advancement:

Grant me an old man's frenzy,

Myself must I remake
Till I am Timon and Lear
Or that William Blake
Who beat upon the wall
Till truth obeyed his call. (*An Acre of Grass*: 99-104)

Thus, Yeats's poetics of dualism showcases the profound meditation of opposites leading to their unified perception. His gamut of poetry captures the internal journey of self-knowledge, through a rigorous process, resulting in the conflicting thoughts and symbols. Unity of being becomes a static element in Yeats' poetry for strengthening his soul.

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Echo of Gerontological Consciousness Representing the Angst: A Study of W.B Yeats's Poems

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> *This is the first thing*
> *I have understood:*
> *Time is the echo of an axe*
> *Within a wood.*
> *–Philip Larkin*

Every Cinema enthusiast, especially the children, will remember Satyajit Ray's famous film '*Goopy Bagha Phire Elo*' where Ray consciously implies the secret fear of the mind for growing old through two staple characters – Goopy and Bagha who cries before 'Bhooter Raja' expressing their anxiety about aging and are easily trapped by a promise that they would be young again. This romantic craving for youth and vitality is well expressed in Cinematic symbolism. Connecting this gerontophobic angst with W.B Yeats' poetry and his personal life, a new aspect of gerontological psyche of the poet is revealed. In this context, Simone de Beauvoir says "… it is old age rather than death that is to be contrasted with life. Old age is life's parody."(539:1996)) Actually old age and the process of aging furnishes the fear in the mind that is to be associated with 'decline' whether physical or psychological and both. Yeats himself states his fear, anger and anxiety:

> I am tired and in a rage at being old. I am all I ever was and much more, but an enemy has bound me and twisted me. (17:1978)

It is not death rather this fear of getting declined or perished leads W.B Yeats to express his angst and gerascophobic freakishness.

Unlike other Romantics, William Butler Yeats was intensely motivated by the themes of old age and aging because his major poetry came after the age of fifty. His unrequited love for Maud Gonne kindled that gerontological angst during the last decade of Nineties. Finally, Maud Gonne's marriage with John MacBride in 1903 smashed all his hopes and expectations and constituted a tomb over his romantic love. *Sailing to Byzantium* (1927) and *The Tower* (1928) are two major works of Yeats that evoke the anxiety of 'biological ageing' and 'psychological ageing' through metaphorical depiction of his own sufferings and illness. In his poem "Sailing to Byzantium" Yeats writes, 'That is no country for old men' symbolizing the direct discarding of the features of old age. The conscious mind of Yeats is always pricked by this sense that he is moving to his old age, a stage when a person is incapable of fulfilling his dreams and lives with his 'tattered coats' on bonny structure:

> An aged man is but a paltry thing,
>
> A tattered coat upon stick, unless
>
> Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
>
> For every tatter in its mortal dress. (CP:1956)

Hence, Yeats expresses his plea for the emancipation of old age. In the poem "The Tower" (1928) Yeats compares old age with 'a sort of battered kettle at the heel' and constantly uses the recurring image and symbol of 'ageing'. In the poem "Broken Dream" Yeats also expresses his anxiety of being unfulfilled in his love with Maud Gonne and he also thinks that he becomes old now and she (Maud Gonne) also becomes old and all her beauty has been faded away:

There is grey in your hair.
Young men no longer suddenly catch their breath
When you are passing; (CP:1956)

Yeats' unrequited love for Maud Gonne also led him to say about her mortal beauty that it only survives in memories now:

Your beauty can but leave among us
Vague memories, nothing but memories. (CP:1956)

Though Yeats writes in *Essays and Introduction* that Blake was great poet and has heroic soul to mark a triumph over the frailty of old age and adds:

> I have been very near the gates of death,' Blake wrote in one of his last letters, and have returned very weak and an old man, feeble and tottering, but not in spirit and life, not in the real man, the imagination, which liveth forever. In that I am stronger and stronger as this foolish body decay. (138)

His complaint regarding perishable impact of old age is conspicuous even in most of the earlier poems. In early collection of poems, the poem "When You are Old" (1893) Yeats draws the dull and decaying features of old age:

When you are old and grey and full of sleep,
And nodding by the fire, take down this book,
And slowly read, and dream of the soft look
Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep; (CP:1956)

Thus Yeats' psychic angst on ageing process recurs in his poems repetitively either through realistic and imagist painting or through symbolic representation of life. Here 'grey', 'full of sleep' and 'slowly read' are symbolic of physical decay and psychological passivity. Even the impact of oldness upon life is so painful and matter of ravaging that in Yeats' words – "There's not a woman turns her face" to like him as stated in the poem "The Lamentation of the Old Pensioner". Drawing metaphorically the analogy of Prufrokian anxiety, Yeats himself feels scared of his own ageing process:

My contemplations are of Time
That has transfigured me. (CP:1956)

In the poem "The Old Men Admiring Themselves in Water" (1903) Yeats anticipates the terrible features of oldness:

They had hands like claws, and their knees
Were twisted like the old thorn trees
By the waters. (CP:1956)

This psychic angst regarding gerontolgy also left a tremendous impact in Yeats' personal life and it led him to propose to the daughter of Maud Gonne, Iseult Gonne. Yeats asked her to marry him in 1916 and in 1917 when he was staying at her mother's house in France. The 'ageing' conscious soul of Yeats moved him to do so. Yeats in his poem "The Wild Swan at Coole" (1919) thinks himself as a contrast to swan which is a symbol of eternal passion and youth and he might consider that Iseult Gonne might consider him as an old man:

> I have looked upon those brilliant creatures,
>
> And now my heart is sore.
>
> All's changed since I, hearing at twilight,
>
> The first time on this shore,
>
> The bell-beat of their wings above my head,
>
> Trod with a lighter tread. (CP:1956)

In fact, Yeats' concern for the old age is so pervading that he has used the images and symbols incorporating the concept of 'ageing' in many of his poems and it focuses not only on the physical decay but also on the psychic angst regarding the ageing process itself. Contrasting to swans whose "hearts have not grown old" Yeats finds himself dull and agitated soul. Most of the times Yeats consciously uses the epithet 'old' to denote his mental anxiety in his several poems, such as, 'old house', 'old fable', 'old beggar' etc. Sometimes Yeats is reminded of the approaching old age by some threatening metaphorical words in the poem "In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markiewicz":

> The innocent and the beautiful
>
> Have no enemy but time; (CP;1956)

Corroborating Yeatsian gerontological concern Philip Larkin later also reflects his anxieties about ageing and expresses his deep consciousness about the floating time and decaying life; he also reminds us of Yeats' gerascophobic mind that believes that ageing is obvious and an old man lives with his memories. In fact, Yeats generalizes his personal concern for old age and makes it a universal issue in modern social perspective.

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The Passage of Time, Youth and Old Age in W. B. Yeats's Poetry

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This paper seeks to ruminate on the concepts of time through the passage of human age from youth to old age. The poetry of William Butler Yeats stands on the crucial intersection between the literary epochs of the Victorians and the Romantics; however in his later poems he shares the desire of the modernists to "find him[self] and not an image" examining his poetic oeuvre in this light, one can find evident anxieties and conflicts about his personal and poetic mortality. This essay seeks to unravel some of the uncertainties abound in the works using his poems, "Sailing to Byzantium" and "Among School Children" as points of reference.

"Sailing to Byzantium" begins with an explicit address of the "self" trying to create a niche for itself. The evocative lines like, "That is no Country for old men" and "those dying generations" appropriately convey the idea. The poet seems to view his situation with a "panoptic" vision (to use the concept of Jeremy Bentham) which implies a complete and critically conscious view of the reality one is enmeshed in. In the poem, 'Byzantium' symbolizes the perfection of art, a "changeless" entity and more importantly, a spiritual life unaffected by temporality. Yeats himself argues stating that " I have always come to this certainty: what moves natural men in the arts is what moves them in life, and that is, the intensity of personal life…" For him, the personal, the political and the historical are interpenetrating, inseparable entities which are invariably present as subtexts in majority of his poems.

A very important line that also forms the crux of the entire poem is that, "Whatever is begotten, born and dies" implying that all organic things are subject to decay and disintegration. Thus all permanence is detached from a living organism. Having accepted this version of reality, Yeats seeks inspiration in "monuments" since they stand for eternity and timelessness which cannot be ravaged by the continuous passage of time. He seeks to fix his poetry, or to "monumentalize" it in other words since he sees it as a piece of art installed in a particular time and space. He envisages immortality for his work against his own mortality, which is the aspiration of every artist. The dichotomy thus lies between the "ageing body" and the "unageing intellect".

An important concept to be explained in this regard is how Yeats conceived of History which is elucidated in his own work "A Vision" wherein he states that the movement of history can be diagrammatically represented in the movement of a 'gyre' Yeats compares the inevitable pattern of this movement to the growth of living being with each species having its own variation of the fundamental paradigm. Geometrically, the gyre starts at its origin and moves progressively wider in a spiral, while time adds another dimension, creating the form of the vortex or funnel. Once the gyre reaches its point of maximum expansion it then begins to narrow until it reaches its end-point which is also the origin of the new gyre. Thus it consists of both centripetal and centrifugal forces, with the notions of Time, Age, Beauty and Truth thrown in for churning, causing complete havoc and destruction in the process. This movement also encompasses a return to consciousness and a greater civilizational shift. The movement is called 'synthesis' which is the result of interaction between the opposing forces of theses and 'anti-thesis' of the corresponding gyres. Also the center or the mutual point of the two opposing gyres forms the "point of stability" or the period of perfection and allows for the development of fresh creative impulses. Byzantium, for the poet thus stands for this particular space. His fears about mortality and the continuous passage of time can be explained with regard to the teleological functioning of history.

There is always an apocalyptic change that heralds a civilizational change which can also be connected to the notion of "tragic joy" propagated by Friedrich Nietzsche which is a dualistic notion combining the terrible and the beautiful. In the poem, the cataclysmic change seems to be the realization and acceptance of death in conflict with the state of his work after his death. Thus he creates a sense of immortality in the figure of the "golden bird" which is a permanent artifact. This idea can be compared with that of John Keats' idea of the art-object in his "Ode on a Grecian Urn" wherein the Urn retains its grandeur through millennia. The golden bird thus sings of past times as well as of times to come.

It is also argued that the bird functions in the text primarily as a "distancing device" and its own sense of beauty and permanence help render its master, his own fears of old age and death while portraying transformation not destruction. The irony here lies in the fact that he is seeking permanence in a sterile object because ultimately the bird cannot sing. Therefore one can question the kind of permanence it actually has. This is a form of artificial preservation illustrated by the phrase "artifice of eternity." Process of death and renewal happens in natural beings, bound to the processes of history. The paradox lies in the fact that it is the ideal state but he laments his own achievement of it. He wants to hold on to something unnatural to preserve his work through "melting time". This concept of free- floating time has also been visually illustrated by the Modernist painter, Salvador Dali in his piece titled, "The Persistence of Memory".

The choice of form, the Ottava Rima too exhibits similar concerns as it is a classical form that the poet uses to resurrect his selfhood. In contrast, in his later poems titled Byzantium, he tries to come to terms with death as artistically as possible. Elsewhere Yeats states, "An early conviction of mine that the creative power of the lyric poet depends upon his accepting some of a few traditional attitudes, lover, sage, hero, scorner of life", this statement suggests that the formation of his aesthetic was not logically controlled and that it was evoked by memory and elaborated through the use of symbols. He insists on the idealistic view of an object while troubled by the fact that human creativity is the result of deterministic external forces. He avers that "all art is not mere storytelling or mere portraiture, is symbolic… and forms a part of the "divine essence"

His poem "Among School Children" also exemplifies his coming to terms with his literal age. The poetic persona walks through the schoolroom questioning and contrasting young children with his sixty-six year old self. He juxtaposes his perspective with theirs. The "smiling public man" indicates that a healthy acceptance of age has taken over the bitter, unfulfilled poetic persona as was evident in "Sailing to Byzantium." He also imagines Maud Gonne's childhood as part of his introspective process and what their relationship would have been like if they had met as young adults. John Wain argues that the "main subject of the poem is the relationship or interpenetration of matter and spirit." The larger theme of the poem is autobiographical as it highlights what Yeats conceives of his future by saying all that he thinks all men would be reduced to "old clothes upon old sticks to scare a bird." He expounds the idea that all men, irrespective of their fame would be converted to the same dilapidated state upon their deaths. He also envisages that mothers would not be able to bear the "pangs of childbirth" if they knew the future of their children. "The uncertainty of his setting forth" is actually the uncertainty in the poet's mind about death. Humans are also susceptible to decay and degeneration. He uses the concept of "telescoping" to discuss the past, present and the future. The term "ghostly paradigms" are used to refer to the state of each individual, which would also be a reference to the "ghosts of modernism" that haunted Yeats by his own admission.

The poem also talks about the metaphorical representation of the birth of art by an artist struggling with the prospect of eternalizing his work to create a certain model of perfection. This is a deliberate shift from the mundane to the metaphysical to highlight the inherent dejection of the poet. Also an important idea propagated is that creative artists lose their body to gain a higher wisdom. Knowledge is thus the price to pay for old age. Also the concept of time in Yeats' poetry is showcased in his poem, "The Phases of the Moon" wherein time is divided into twenty-eight phases. August Martin lucidly explains the philosophy behind his symbolism: "certain periods of history seem to be favorable for the development of human excellence and social harmony. Of these the Athens of Phidias, the Byzantine Empire and the Italian Renaissance stand out for their political culture, their cultivation of arts and their high sense of human excellence, all of which are summarized in Yeats' term "unity of being"."

Yeats emphasized that it is the "making" that launching him into an imaginative world of freedom, a world under the control of his creative will. He urges the reader to participate in the literary imagination by participating in the poet's creative illusion for him, growth and maturity are notions that stir his intellectual capacity; he uses folklore, myths and traditions to reach to the future after withstanding the storms of the present, but having deeper roots in the remote past. To conclude in the words inscribed on his gravestone, "Cast a cold eye/On life, on death/Horseman, pass by!"

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“Myself must I remake”: Old Age, the ‘Material’ and the ‘Spirit’ in Yeats’ Last Poems

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> I find my present weakness made worse by the strange second puberty the operation has given me, the ferment that has come upon my imagination. If I write poetry it will be unlike anything I have done (Yeats, 1935: letter).

The letter written by Yeats, written four years before his death to Dorothy Wellesley, captures the mood of a poet struggling to cope with the last phase of his mortal existence. Yeats’ last group of poems is grouped under the title *Last Poems*, written between 1936 and 1939. These poems are thematically linked in terms of debilitation and staticity of old age, both in terms of physical existence and aesthetic production. Unlike the populist mode of linking old age to lamentation, Yeats desires to have more energy and life force at his old age. These poems move away from the earlier poetic creations of Yeats, which were more concerned with Celtic revival and Irish Nationalist politics, and concentrate more on the personal apathy of a poet-speaker who is finding it tough to recreate the energy and passion of youth. Theme of sexuality is a recurrent motif in these poems, since the poet seeks to regenerate the youthful passion in order to relive the moments of aesthetic fulfillment. In *The Gyres*, Yeats writes:

> “Irrational streams of blood are staining earth:
> Empedocles has thrown all things about;
> Hector is dead and there’s a light in Troy;
> We that look on but laugh in tragic joy” (Yeats, 180).

In the arid wasteland of old age and lessened intellectual capacity, Hector and Empedocles serve as distant temporal memory of the poet, who can only cerebrally respond to classical antiquity without participating in the passion emblematized by its ‘heroic culture’. So the speaker-poet can only remain subservient to an oxymoronic “tragic joy”, getting into a catharsis of purgatorial old age redemption. The new found passion and vigour in the *Last Poems* can be traced to the erotic adventures that Yeats had in his old age. He was romantically inclined to actress Margot Ruddock as also to the journalist and sexual radical Ethel Mannin, both of whom had made considerable influence on the content of Yeats’ *Last Poems*. Yeats’ concern in these poems is as much about loneliness in the old days, as also for a quest of finding an energy that will refashion the being and ontology of the speaker. He writes in *Lapis Lazuli*:

> “All men have aimed at, found and lost;
> Black out; Heaven blazing into the head:
> Tragedy wrought to its uttermost.” (Yeats, 181)

For Yeats, time is not an agent of tragedy but the loss of sexual energy is. Going against the accepted norms of social propriety, Yeats challenges sexual morality, constructed by society, and quests for “an old man’s frenzy” (*An Acre of Grass*) in order to refashion the debilitated and mutated body into a renewed state of passion and intellectual/animal freedom.

After receiving the Nobel Prize in 1923, Yeats opined on stage, “I was good-looking once like that young man, but my unpracticed verse was full of infirmity, my Muse old as it were. Now I am old and rheumatic, and nothing to look at, but my Muse young” (Yeats, 2012: 46-61). This declaration of Yeats is a fascinating insight into a poet’s mind grappling with the struggles of anti-thesis and contradictions of life. However, Yeats’ Muse grows younger with time because the fallacy of the idea of poetic creation is that it becomes more matured with aging. The esoteric quality of poetic passion is emblematized in the phrase “lovers of horses and women” (*The Gyres*), where Yeats tries to bring about a union between sexual passion and aesthetic recognition of beauty with a stroke of philosophical contemplation on the nature of physical objectification itself. Horses and women are not essentially binaries, they complement each other for the poet's assertion of beauty in a transient world. There is a sense of pervading emptiness in the imagery that Yeats uses in these poems. In *The Curse of Cromwell*, Yeats writes:

> "I came on a great house in the middle of the night
> Its open lighted doorway and its windows all alight,
> And all my friends were there and made me welcome too;
> But I woke in an old ruin that the winds howled through;… " (Yeats, 186)

A G Stock observes that Yeats "prayed it so earnestly that it kept his mind active to the last days of his life and made him of all poets who have written of old age, the least tranquilizing and the most exhilarating" (Stock, 195). The evocative imagery in the above passage shows the exasperating sense of desolation that the speaker feels while he is at the fringe of death. What comes through from the stylistic aspect is the use of chiaroscuro. The 'night' is juxtaposed with 'windows all alight', perhaps symbolizing the contradictory proposition of old age that Yeats have- he is acutely aware of the condition of decapitation in the old age, and at the same time, seeks for a renewal of life and energy from the spiritual point of view, via the physical route. Yeats' reading of Eastern philosophy through his association with Mohini Chatterjee, and later Rabindranath Tagore and Swedenborg might have influenced the Karmic philosophy that he seems to be delineating in his poems on old age. The immersion into sexual energy in order to achieve a certain sense of spiritual objectivity is the centerpiece of Karmic activities, and Yeats seems to have imbibed this part of Occultism for his passion for energy and life force in old age.

Yeats' *Last Poems* show a Modernist technique of writing poetry- that is of Imagism and intertextuality. As a kind of manifesto to Imagist poetry, Pound wrote in *Des Imagistes: An Anthology* in 1914 that there should be a "direct treatment of the 'thing', whether subjective or objective", "that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time" (Pound, web). As opposed to the Romantic style of poetry in his earlier poems, Yeats appropriates the Modernist style of representation, perhaps because the "shock value" of such a technique suits the theme of sexual and intellectual energy that the poet is seeking for as an antidote for old age's loneliness. The speaker is caught in a world of such spiritual and bodily stasis that the Dantean hell seems to be recreated in the existential angst of the present. Yeats writes in *The Pilgrim*:

> "All know that all the dead in the world about that place are stuck
> And that should mother seek her son she'd have but little luck
> Because the fires of purgatory have ate their shapes away;… " (Yeats, 191)

The ritualistic cleansing that is associated with purgation seems to have taken a turn for religious barrenness since both the mother and the son are not able to immerse in the process of the regeneration of the soul. Both the creator and the created are imprisoned in the labyrinth of an endless maze of timeless suffering and as a result the old man can only "lean upon the wall" and look at the smugness of the "learned lovers" (ibid), the petite bourgeoisie lingering on meaningless existence, but he has no case for retribution. For Yeats, "life was exciting, but there was the bother of old age… his remedy for age was a search for intellectual interests" (Jeffares, 233). In the same poem as above, the poet seems to be weaving a pattern of images to form a larger scheme of poetic representation. On one hand, he depicts the public spaces like the stations, public houses and the churches and on the other hand, there are a plethora of images that relate to the psycho-pathological disintegration in the old age- bone marrows, rags of silk, the country shawl and the dumbfounded old man in prayer. These would come close to what Eliot called the 'objective correlative' by 'showing' or externalizing the emotion through patterns of images. Yeats' old age therefore achieve a certain sense of objective outlook that seeks to dispense with the notion of sentimentality associated with old age paralysis. In this regard, Yeats comes closer to the more "mainstream" Modernists like Pound, Eliot or Doolittle than is actually thought of. Yeats delves into the question of identity from middle age onwards, reflecting on the loss of essential passion and quest motif of life, as he sarcastically writes in *What Then ?*:

> "All this happier dreams came true
> A small old house, wife, daughter, son
> Grounds where plum and cabbage grew
> Poets and Wits about him drew" (Yeats, 184).

The images here are caustic in their irony; the old man is constricted by a domesticated existence, weighed down by social morality, even though poets and wits flowed in his consciousness- he is crushed by the social expectations of fulfilling social roles, which is detrimental to the intellectual and sexual passion that the poet seeks for in his twilight years.

The Romantic in Yeats is not totally a configurated tradition from the generation of Wordsworth and Keats, but a reoriented version of a seeker, who does not binarised between the material and the spirit. One of the socio-cultural aspects of European Renaissance has been to create an altercation between the ‘spirit’ and the ‘material’, with the hegemonic hierarchy tilting towards the former. The nineteenth century Romantics carry on with the same Episcopian view of reality, but Yeats represents in his poetry a unique blend of the material with the spirit, without hierarchising the two. This is significant because the ‘material’ is considered as a taboo in old age, especially when it comes to the matters of body and physical intimacy for a sexual act. In *The Wild Old Wicked Man*, Yeats writes:

> “Because I am mad about women
> I am mad about the hills
> Said the wild old wicked man
> Who travels where God wills.
> Not to die on the straw at home
> Those hands to close these eyes,… ” (Yeats, 188)

Apart from the adjectives “wild” and “wicked”, which associate the old man with anti-establishment and anti-Puritan tendencies, Yeats also uses the image of the hills to symbolize male erection, which in turn stands for the old man’s desire for using sexual energy to refashion himself to a state of heightened consciousness. In “An Acre of Grass”, the poet desires to “remake” himself for an “old man’s frenzy”, “Till I am Timon or Lear/ Or that William Blake” (Yeats, 183). The poet feels the intense need to remake his state of being to transform himself from being unaccomodated to a state of unison with the larger truth and Being. Yeats noted “I am tired and in a rage at being old. I am all I ever was and much more, but an enemy has bound me and twisted me” (Yeats, 1978:17). The old speaker-poet’s position is problematic- at one hand there is an intense desire to break free and transcend into the world of spiritual truth, on the other hand there is an acute awareness of the confines of physical existence and the consequent bound condition that it creates. The pot is not content, he is not meant to accept his dilapidated condition:

> “Infirm and aged I might be
> In some good company,
> I who have always hated work,
> Smiling at the sea,…
> But I am not content” (Yeats in *Are You Content?*, 194)

The poet speaker’s discontentment rises from his lack of spiritual and sexual engagement that leads him castrated at different levels. Yeats’ *Last Poems* therefore successfully portray a schizophrenic modern world that struggles to come to terms with its own paranoia and pathological and neurotic illness, as the old speaker quests for more sexual and spiritual energy to sustain himself. Indeed, it is not for no reason that Eliot called Yeats “the greatest poet of his age”. (Eliot, 613).

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W.B. Yeats: A Lover and a Poet

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> “Does the imagination dwell the most
> Upon a woman won or woman lost?”
> (Yeats: The Tower:114-15)

The poetry of W.B William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) stretches across the whole period of the late Victorian and early Modern ages. One of the common themes of Yeats’ poetry is love. Maud Gonne was a kind of obsession for him. His love for Maud Gonne was unyielding and he could never get rid of the obsessive feelings for her.

Maud Gonne (1866–1953) was the Muse behind the oeuvre of Yeats’ splendid love poems. As Beatrice was to Dante so was Maud Gonne to Yeats. Maud Gonne first visited the Yeats family household in London when the poet was 23 and she 22. Yeats fell in love with her. Maud Gonne already had a French lover, Lucien Millevoye. She later married the Irish patriot, Major John MacBride. Maud Gonne was a radical Irish revolutionary. In *Memoirs,* W. B. Yeats writes about Gonne:

> I had never thought to see in a living woman so great beauty. It belonged to famous pictures, to poetry, to some legendary past. A complexion like the blossom of apples, and yet face and body had the beauty of lineaments which Blake calls the highest beauty because it changes least from youth to age, and a stature so great that she seemed of a divine race. (40).

Yeats revealed to Gonne his unhappiness without her love and she replied thus, “Oh yes, you are, because you make beautiful poetry out of what you call your unhappiness and are happy in that.” Marriage would be such a dull affair, she said. A poet should never marry. “The world should thank me for not marrying you” (*Autobiography* 319). In “Beautiful Lofty Things” (1938) Yeats directly mentions the name of Maud Gonne- ‘Maud Gonne at Howath station waiting a train’ (10).

Yeats’s *Memoirs* (1972) reveals how he tried to divert himself from the thoughts of Gonne to a novelist named Olivia Shakespear (1863–1938). Shakespear’s image of luxuriant and embowering hair dominates the poems in *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899). Shakespear inspired the poems like “He bids his Beloved be at Peace” (1896), “He gives his Beloved certain Rhymes” (1896), “He remembers Forgotten Beauty” (1896), “He reproves the Curlew” (1896) “The Lover asks Forgiveness because of his Many Moods”(1895), “The Lover mourns for the Loss of Love” (1898), “A Poet to his Beloved” (1896) and “The Travail of Passion”(1896) (*Olivia Shakespear and W. B. Yeats* 71).

Harwood writes, “In the ‘Olivia Shakespear’ poems, the iconography centres on imagery of hair, and the beloved is clearly mortal, whereas in the ‘Maud Gonne’ poems the emphasis falls upon eyes and eyelids, and the beloved becomes a quasi-immortal being, with absolute power over the poet. The distinction only exists during the years 1895–1897, after which Olivia Shakespear is no longer represented in the poems, and imagery of hair reverts in reference to Maud Gonne” (73–74). In London, throughout the 1890s and early 1900s, Yeats had a close relationship with actress Florence Farr. She produced the *Land of Heart’s Desire* in 1894 and even acted in *The Countess Cathleen* in 1899.

Iseult Gonne (1894-1954) was one of the two children that Maud Gonne bore from her relationship with the French Lucien Millevoye before she was married to John MacBride. Iseult was in certain ways her mother's opposite: she was poetic not political. In the summer of 1917, Yeats proposed to her repeatedly but she did not respond to it. Harold Bloom describes Yeats' love for Iseult Gonne as "the poet's brief, strange, quasi-love for Iseult Gonne,"(198).

According to A. Norman Jeffares, Maud Gonne and Yeats were walking one afternoon on the cliffs at Howth at the mouth of Dublin Bay in the month of August in 1891 when two seagulls flew over their heads. Maud Gonne desired to be transformed into a seagull (*Man and Poet* 68). After three days the poet composed the beautiful poem "The White Birds" (1892) where he wishes to be transformed, together with his beloved into the white birds, so that they can have a chance to live together apart from the sorrow and the mortality of the real world that dooms them to live away from each other:

> For I would we were changed to white birds on the wandering foam:
> I and you!
> . . . .
> Where Time would surely forget us, and Sorrow come near us no more; (8,10)

In "The Song of Wandering Aengus" (1897), Aengus tells that one day he went to a hazel wood for fishing and managed to catch a 'little silver trout'(8). Suddenly the fish was transformed into a "glimmering girl" with "apple blossoms in her hair" and by calling him his name "faded through the brightening air" (13-16). He dreams that he will find the girl and "kiss her lips and take her hands" (20). The girl with 'apple blossoms in her hair' in the poem may be Maud Gonne. Yeats in his*Autobiographies* writes about Maud Gonne, "Her complexion was luminous, like that of apple-blossom through which the light falls, and I remember her standing that first day by a great heap of such blossoms in the window" (120). Yeats repeats the apple-blossom association in "The Arrow" (6), in *Memoirs* (40), and in *The Speckled Bird* (37, 40).

In the poem, "He Bids his Beloved be at Peace" (1896), the poet takes refuge in the arms of his beloved who is none other than Olivia Shakespear (*Mem.*86) and asks her, "Beloved let your eyes half close, and your heart beat/ Over my heart, and your hair fall over my breast,/ Drowning love's lonely hour in deep twilight of rest" (9-11). This is truly romantic. It reveals how much the poet craves to be lost in love.

Yeats' effort of winning the heart of Maud Gonne was fruitless. In the poem, "He Wishes His Beloved Were Dead" (1898), the poet wishes that her beloved were dead so that she will refuse his love for her and he will be in liberty to love her to his heart's content:

> Were you but lying cold and dead,
> . . . .
> And I would lay my head on your breast;
> And you would murmur tender words,
> Forgiving me, because you were dead: (1, 4-6)

The poem "Adam's Curse" (1902) originates from a conversation that Yeats had with Maud Gonne and her sister Kathleen Pilcher at Kathleen's home in London. The story behind the poem was written in details by Maud Gonne in *The Autobiography of Maud Gonne* (1938):

> I was still in my dark clothes with the black veil I always wore when travelling instead of a hat, and we must have made a strange contrast. I saw Willie Yeats looking critically at me and he told Kathleen he liked her dress and that she was looking younger than ever. It was on that occasion Kathleen remarked that it was hard work being beautiful, which Willie turned into his poem *Adam's Curse*. (317)

Yeats writes in "Adam's Curse":

> We sat grown quiet at the name of love;
> We saw the last embers of daylight die,
> And in the trembling blue-green of the sky
> A moon, worn as if it had been a shell
> Washed by time's waters as they rose and fell (28-32)

Yeats makes an analogy between moon and love as they shed their vigour and splendour in course of time. The moon is "washed by time's waters" whereas love's brightness dims and makes the lovers sit "grown quiet". Yeats' love for Maud Gonne had never been answered and he painted the painful condition of his heart in that poem.

"Never Give all the Heart" (1905) was written at the news of Maud Gonne's marriage to John MacBride (1865–1916) on February 21, 1903. This poem is a kind of advice in which the poet says that it is of no use giving heart to 'passionate women' as they will not value true love. Yeats has loved one with all his heart but he has failed to impress the woman. So he says, "He that made this knows all the cost, / For he gave all his heart and lost" (13-14).

"No Second Troy" (1910) is Yeats' most striking invocation of Helen. Here Yeats elevates Maud Gonne to the status of the mythical Helen:

> With beauty like a tightened bow, a kind
> That is not natural in an age like this,
> Being high and solitary and most stern?
> Why, what could she have done, being what she is?
> Was there another Troy for her to burn? (8-12)

The title "No Second Troy" makes it clear that Yeats equates Maud Gonne with Helen, the destructive Greek beauty. Richard Ellmann comments that,

> The success of the poem comes partly from the poet's withholding the identification of his beloved with Helen until the last line, when it fairly explodes. Yeats manages this by basing the identification not merely on beauty, but also on destructive power, and thus shunning sentimentality (111–112).

The poem, "To a Child Dancing in the Wind" (1912) is addressed to Iseult Gonne and it appeared in *Responsibilities*(1914). Yeats addresses her thus:

> Being young you have not known
> The fool's triumph nor yet
> Love lost as soon as won, (6-8)

Iseult is too 'young' to realize the cruel ways of love. He is frustrated for being rejected in love. He had thought that Maud Gonne would have similar feelings for him that he had for her.

Yeats expresses his pure love for Gonne by celebrating both her beauty and the sweet memories with her. Poems like "He Thinks of Those Who Have Spoken Evil of his Beloved" (1916), "He Tells of the Perfect Beauty" (1896), and "He Tells of a Valley Full of Lovers" (1897) celebrate Gonne's beauty that flames the fire of love in Yeats' heart. Poems like "A Memory of Youth" (1932), "Fallen Majesty" (1912), "Friends" (1912), "That the Night Come" (1912), "Memory"(1916), "Her Praise" (1916), "His Phoenix" (1916), "Broken Dreams" (1917), "A Deep- Sworn Vow" (1917) and "Presences" (1917) celebrate sweet moments and memories with Gonne.

Passion of love was so strong in Yeats that whenever he sat to write poetry, the words of love spontaneously came out of his pen. In a letter to Olivia Shakespeare, in 1926, Yeats writes, "We are at our Tower and I am writing poetry as I always do here, and as always happens, no matter how I begin, it becomes love poetry before I am finished with it" (*Yeats* 1954: 714-15).

To conclude, most of Yeats' poems are dedicated consciously or unconsciously to Maud Gonne, Yeats' unfulfilled and unrequited one-sided love. The poems express his desire for and his devotion to Maud Gonne. Yeats' failure and frustration in love were blessings in disguise. Had it not been so, we would have been deprived of enjoying Yeats' lovely lyrics. Maud Gonne was the love of his life. His love for Maud Gonne as well as for others has been immortalized by the immortal poetry of the mortal poet.

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Yeats and War Poetry

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> I shall keep the neighborhood of the seven sleepers of Ephesus, hoping to catch their comfortable snores till bloody frivolity is over. (Yeats, 600)

The above comment made by W. B. Yeats in relation to the Great War is often quoted to reveal his notorious apathy on the subject. Yeats had always maintained a deliberate indifference with respect to the event that had endangered the whole of Europe, especially England. The same disinterest is vented in the poem "On Being Asked for a War Poem":

> I think it better that at times like these
> A poet's mouth be silent, for in truth
> We have no gift to state a statesman right;
> He's had enough of meddling who can please
> A young girl in the indolence of her youth,
> Or an old man upon a winter's night. (Yeats).

The poem was written on the request of Henry James for the anthology *The Book of Homeless* edited by Edith Wharton the proceeds of which were to help the refugees of war. The poem drew an angry response from critics and even in the view of John Quinn, the American patron of Yeats, "those five and six lines were quite unworthy of you and the occasion" and some profound "expression as an artist in the form of prose or verse that your genius might take- some token that you felt that in this, perhaps the greatest struggle of all time, you had been on the side of justice and right" (192).Yeats has been misinterpreted often, as the yardstick of "war poetry" is regarded to have been set by the two English soldier-poets Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon whose poetry vividly portrays the intense personal experiences of trauma: physical, moral and psychological. Yeats' sole poetry written on this occasion on the other hand tries to explain his disengagement with the Great War. An important reason why Yeats' poetry lacks the emergency that is evident in the English war poets is because he refuses to admit the Great War's impact on Irish culture as anything but minimal. Yeats has always maintained that the conflict between Ireland and England is the conflict between a "spiritual nation" and a "materialist, capitalist, industrialized society" (Brearton, 46). Imperialism and the Great War evidently ensemble in materialist society. The Great War and its perpetrators are therefore segregated from Yeats' idea of what constitutes an ideal society.

Yeats however could not distance himself for long from the Great War as it triggered a succession of violence – The Easter Rising, The Anglo-Irish War and The Civil War- that affected Ireland. Yeats' poems written during these occasions show how his aesthetic concerns contrast greatly with regard to other famous war poets like Owen, Sassoon, Blunden and Rosenberg. In the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, Yeats explains his reason for not succumbing to the pressure of writing the kind of war poetry that he was expected to write:

> I have a distaste for certain poems written in the midst of the great war, they are in all anthologies but I have substituted Herbert Reed's " End of the War" written long after. The writers of these poems were invariably officers of exceptional courage and capacity, one a man constantly selected for dangerous work, all, I think, had the Military Cross: their letters are vivid and humorous, they were not without joy-for all skill is joyful- but felt bound, in the words of the best known, to

plead the suffering of their men. In poems that had for a time considerable fame, written in the first person, they made that suffering their own. I have rejected these poems for the same reason that made Arnold withdraw his "Empedocles on Etna" from circulation; passive suffering is not a theme for poetry. In all the great tragedies, tragedy is a joy to the man who dies; in Greece the tragic chorus danced (xi).

Yeats in this passage lashes out against the kind of aesthetics and poetry that Owen and his comrade promoted. Owen in the "Preface" of *Disabled and Other Poems* promotes empathy as his primary aesthetic: "Above all I am not concerned with Poetry. My subject is War, and the pity of War. The poetry is in the Pity"(xiv). This aesthetic is criticized by Yeats as it brings down poetry to the level of solipsism. Yeats is not in favour of restricting his poetry on war to the historical events at the expense of imagination. Yeats believed that a poet has no hand in altering the course of history and this justifies his silence in "On being asked for a War Poem".

Yeats is not regarded as a war poet due to the fact that his poetry widely differs from the Great War poetry of the English soldiers. Yet Yeats has created a new model in his writing during the Irish unrest. The events of Easter Rising in Ireland prompted Yeats to write "Easter 1916" with the refrain –"all changed, changed utterly: / a terrible beauty is born." Yeats did not create abstract heroes out of the martyrs but couched in mythology are the rebels as the agents of change. Easter, which stands for renewal, is the occasion of sacrificing individual identities for a greater communal cause. Yeats deferred the naming of the rebels till the end of the poem which lends a dramatic edge to the poem. The poem equates the War with theatre and the mutineers are the unnamed actors who are "resigned to his (their) part/ In the casual comedy". This, however, distances the readers from the historical and factual details of the Rising and presents it as a commonplace wartime incident. The terror of the war as found in Owen's poetry has been distilled by the imaginative vision and rhetoric of Yeats. The events of Easter Rising are often considered as reality crafted out of imagination and this imagination filters in Yeats poetry and distinguishes it from the propaganda literature of the Great War.

Yeats' reaction to the physical and emotional violence of the Anglo-Irish war that started in January 21, 1919 is vented in the sequence of a typical war poem "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen". "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" does not glorify the war heroes nor does it recount the horrors of the battlefield, rather it deals with the theme of temporality and permanence triggered by the war. The poem enigmatically expresses violence inherent in wars as a force that is a necessary catalyst of change in the cycles of history-"So the Platonic Year / Whirls out new right or wrong, whirls in the old instead." The war ushers in the "Platonic Year" with its new sets of values but which are ironically only a revised version of the moral system of bygone eras. "Meditations in Time of Civil War" is a poem sequence that was written when Ireland was swamped by the Irish Civil War in 1922. The poems in the sequence explore the role of the poet during times of unrest and Yeats cannot conceive of any adequate role in a war wrecked nation. He confesses that the plethora of masks that he had thrown on over the years as either a poet or a man has left a mutilated self that is not capable enough to prevent Ireland's gradual plunge in war. Here we have the antithesis of the reaction that we have perceived in "On Being Asked for a War Poem": the apathy during the Great War is substituted by the regret of war and violence. He struggles to attain contentment at his impotence of being just a poet and not a soldier or a statesman and the poem ends with the following consolation: "…The abstract joy, / The half-read wisdom of daemonic images/ Suffice the ageing man as the growing boy."

Yeats was vulnerable to criticism as he proclaimed that the tragedy of the Great War was in no way related to the Irish history and thus had no connection to the Irish cultural life. But the Irish years of turbulence are well recorded in Yeats' poetry and his aesthetics have been greatly shaped by the unrest in Ireland- the Easter Rising, Anglo-Irish War and the Irish Civil War. The turbulent years of war and violence had compelled Yeats to look beyond the Celtic mythologies which had been his staple subject for poetry. The poetry that he composed henceforth reflects the tangible consequences of war in the realm of imagination and Yeats soon surpassed the provincial image and achieved the stature of an international poet.

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Astronomical Symbols in Selected Poems of W.B. Yeats

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> I have desired like every artist, to create a little world out of the beautiful, pleasant and significant things of this marred and clumsy world
>
> *-The Celtic Twilight*

Through this line Yeats has excellently delineated his creative world. His creative world is pervaded by multiple poetic styles. His use of symbol has added to the glory and aura to that poetic endeavour. His poetry stretches across the whole period of the late Victorian and Early Modern ages. Through this period he has shown maturity and mastery in handling the different poetic style. Ronald Carter has rightly commented that "Yeats's poetry undergoes more marked changes during these years than that of Hardy. Yeats is not as restlessly experimental as T.S. Eliot, but he is not as content as Hardy to work with traditional forms and poetic subject matter." (*The Routledge History of Literature in English,* 335*)*. He is thought to have passed through three main stages of development. Through these three stages he had shown different meanings of the same entity. He had immense liking towards sun, moon and star. These are the basic antinomies. He recurrently referred to them. If we probe deeper, we can have the idea of how he had created multiple layer of meaning for the same thing. His symbols convey meanings not from one fixed point but rather from several points.

Symbol is a way of revelation of higher truth-arriving imaginative truth in literary works. Idea of symbol has changed in course of time. But still its function has not diminished. Carlyle has pertinently pointed out:

> It is in and through symbols that man, consciously or unconsciously, lives, works, and has his being: those ages, moreover, are accounted the noblest which can the best recognize symbolical worth, and prize it highest. (Sarter Resartes, Book3, Chapter3)

Symbols add to the inexhaustible supply of meanings and association. As in most symbolical thoughts, the moon is actually the light of the changing, transitory world. In Yeats it is the source of subjective perception, whereas, the sun is the source of light of the super sensory world, the light of the fundamental laws of the universe. Yeats had early interest in the light and dark effect.

These entities-sun, moon and star have the touch of something divine. They are the sources of God-like force which pulsate through nature. Different cultures of different societies cherish different thoughts. Ireland was once rich in astronomical mythologies. Even in the place name one can find astronomical reference. There is mystery of creation in Irish folklore about how the earth has contained life after the stars begin to shine. Naturally people in Ireland had bent towards these astronomical entities and this is reflected in the titles of the book such as *The Plough and the Stars* by O'Casey, *The Rising of the Moon* by Gregory etc. Irish art and culture experienced the solar illumination-direct representation of the moon and the sun. Irish ballad had revered this archetype for the perfect presentation of the natural world-"I bid unto myself today/ the virtues of the star-lit heaven/ the glorious sun's light giving ray, the whiteness of the moon at even…" (The Liturgy of St. Patrick). Even Shakespeare did not forget to mention the animals' closeness to the nature when he writes in *As You Like It* –"Like the howling of Irish wolves against the moon" (5.3.92). All these create a mystical element in Irish literature. Yeats was too much concerned with this mystical element. He puts it thus:

> …the mystical life is the centre of all that I do and all that I think and all that I write. (Letter to O' Leary, July 23, 1892)

This interest in mystical world led him to employ images, and pattern of oppositional configuration. However, it is difficult to find particular and consistent meaning of these two entities in Yeats' poetic world.

At the outset Yeats had interest towards the romantic efflorescence and exuberance of Nature. However, in course of time he aspired towards reality. He evoked this reality evolved from his personal experience. As an Irish he was imbued with the myth, folklore, and dreamy landscape of Ireland. His genius was 'the greatest of all powers, capable of evoking Nature's memory itself' (Balachandra Rajan, p.28). His early poems had emotion but this emotion had developed later into intellect. Emotion and intellect together creates a rich poetic world. Symbols of moon, sun and star play the main parts in supplying the inexhaustible meaning and association in Yeats' world.

In his earlier poetry he had drawn upon the fairy and folktales of Ireland. Therefore, we find reference to Gaelic legends, the Cuchulain saga and the Tales of Fianna in abundance. So we find the figure of Cuchulain in the poem 'Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea'. This poem is written in dramatic style. It recounts Cuchulain's slaughter of a young challenger whom he later discovers to be his son. Therefore, tinge of melancholy like that of Shelley can be found. Image of star serves the role of expressing the potent idea of sadness.

Whether under its daylight or its stars
My father stands amid his battle-cars.'
…………………………………………………….
Yet somewhere under starlight or the sun
My father stands.
'I only ask what way my journey lies,
For He who made you bitter made you wise.
(Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea)

Love is an important theme in Yeats. Generally, 'Rose' is associated with love and romance. In Yeats' 'To the Rose upon the Rood of Time' 'Rose' suggests beautiful symbol of nationalism in Ireland. In his early years Yeats was swayed by the nationalist idea of the revolutionaries. This poem sings the paean of the early mythic characters of history. Here, image of 'stars' evokes the early mythic characters in history.

…whereof stars, grown old
In dancing silver-sandalled on the sea,
Sing in their high and lonely melody.
(To the Rose upon the Rood of Time)

Moon which is traditionally associated with love finds brilliant place in Yeats's poem 'The Sorrow of Love' to evoke the melancholies of love. This poem is brilliant for the interweaving of man with Nature. Love finds its predominance even within its infusing notes of somberness.

A climbing moon upon an empty sky,
And all that lamentation of the leaves,
Could but compose man's image and his cry.
(The Sorrow of Love)

The image and symbol of the moon in association with 'lamentation of the leaves' creates a gloomy atmosphere in unison with the girl's gloominess.

In 'He Wishes His Beloved were Dead' he wishes that Maud Gonne would come to 'murmur tender words of forgiveness'. This love is not animating or exhilarating. Rather this love is buried and dead as Gonne's love has slowly dwindled away from him. Probably there is an element of hostility and benevolence in this love because Yeats' love has proved to be failure. So poet's helplessness is expressed reasonably. Here, the astronomical association has rendered perfect ambience to that kind of love. Here is the succinct picture of it:

About the stars and moon and sun:
O would, beloved, that you lay
Under the cock-leaves in the ground,
While lights were paling one by one.
(He Wishes His Beloved Were Dead)

Actually the poetry of the first phase of Yeats was marked by exuberance of romantic nostalgia and these lines of the poems reveal the potent relationship of the astronomical nature and the people in general. There is evocation of Irish background.

The superstition of moon in association with animal is also stated in Yeats' poem 'The Cat and the Moon.' Here, the cat is the black Persian cat which once belonged to Maud Gonne. The moon is thought to have a sacred place in Celtic belief. Yeats was very much aware of it and he notes down this fact in his poem. It has feminine quality. Through the metaphor of the moon and the cat the basic relationship between Yeats and Maud Gonne is explored. Maud is now a lost love but still she is serving as the muse behind Yeats' poetry. The moon is now shedding 'pure cold light' and this actually makes disturbance on him. Moreover, the love proves to a matter of inconsistency on their part -"Maybe the moon may learn,/ Tired of that courtly fashion,/ A new dance turn." The waning phase of the moon actually marks this point.

From moonlit place to place,
The sacred moon overheard
Has taken a new phase.
(The Cat and the Moon)

This image of the moon as the creative impulse is not new in Yeats' poetic ideas. He uses it more explicitly in his poem 'Lines Written in Dejection'. It is rooted in romantic self-lamentation like the poems such as Coleridge's 'Dejection: An Ode', Shelley's 'Stanzas Written in Dejection December 1818, Near Naples'. This poem presents the mid-life ebb of the imagination, the loss of power to sustain creativity on the part of Yeats. The poem centers round the opposition between the feminine moon which presides over the imagination and the masculine sun which presides over the physical world. Having reached fifteen years of age Yeats surrenders himself to his pathetic condition. So 'the dark leopards of the moon' has gone with their 'round green eyes' and 'long wavering bodies'. Yeats must have to endure the rejected and dejected state of mind:

The holy centaurs of the hill are vanished;
I have nothing but the embittered sun;
Banished heroic mother moon and vanished,
And now that I have come to fifty years
I must endure the timid sun.
(Lines Written in Dejection)

Here the 'timid sun' indicates the light vitality of mind and creativity. This would not make his writings so powerful. Rather, it would make him 'embittered' to think about his fruitful creative life. So he would have to put up with it.

'The Second Coming' is a poem commenting severely upon the horrors of the First World War.

Here is an image of a Sphinx-like figure whose gaze is compared to that of the sun:

Somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs,
(The Second Coming)

The note is indeed modern. Actually the early effusion of romantic impulsion gradually leads way to hard-core modern idea. He uses the same astronomical metaphoric entity in new style. So he fuses the image of terrible beauty with imaginative convulsion and evocation. Though it is taken from traditional Greek myth, it does not lack in modernity. Indeed, "It took a later generation of Modernists to savor the dissonance between fact and myth with full appreciation of the aesthetic possibilities" (Albright, Daniel). Yeats attained the unattainable by fusing aestheticism with modernism.

Yeats' 'The Tower' records his mature experience of life. It is an emblem of the accretion of history and the purity of solitude. A. Norman Jeffares has written in his book *A New Commentary on the Poems of W.B. Yeats* about Yeats' style of writings:

> He uses a symbolism which is direct speech, it records the richness of his life as well as its bitterness. (xiv)

Leaving the romantic fragments he is now concerned with reality. He beckons to the 'images and memories' from ruins of houses to create translucent pieces of works. Then he throws ample light on the poetic creed. Actually the poet establishes the fact that recapitulation forms the mainstay of creative writing which is a journey down memory lane. This creative piece may have frenzied effect upon the imagination. This is explained through the symbol of 'moon' and 'sunlight':

O may the moon and sunlight seem
One inextricable beam,
For if I triumph I must make men mad.
(The Tower)

Moon, sun and star, according to Yeats, have spectacularly visionary effects upon the literary artifacts. Those may cast 'mighty memories' and these 'memories through which the poet defines his own self, constitute the very staff which imagination, a transcendent faculty, can work into poetry' (L.N.Gupta). Yeats thus puts down:

Aye, sun and moon and star, all,
And further add to that
That, being dead, we rise,
Dream, and so create
Translunar Paradise.
(The Tower)

Here, 'Translunar Paradise' suggests the realm beyond the visible world where the soul and body reside in their perfection. The 'superhuman/Mirror-resembling dream' reflects a self-legislated reality which is the expression of bitter soul.

In this way Yeats has recurrently used the astronomical symbols. Some of the uses are extremely original. These symbols serve as a means of resolving some of the dichotomies in life that had arrested Yeats' interest from the very beginning of the literary career. Yeats had finely embraced the new literary mode and medium to express the vision of the ages. In this regard, he has become successful. Indeed,

> Yeats's art has lost its roots in popular love and folk belief, so that he is left with only the intellectual elaborateness of a desiccated civilization. (Thomas Parkinson)

Yeats' astronomical symbols are evocative and sensitive. They embody Yeats' intellect and emotion to cope up with the modern situation leaving behind the last trail of romantic glinting as he is aptly called the 'Last Romantic'.

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Permanence of the Impermanent in Selected Poems by William Butler Yeats

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"There is nothing permanent except change."— Heraclitus

William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), is one of the greatest poets of Ireland. He is a renowned leader of Irish Renaissance. Yeats deals with the theme of the permanence of impermanence in his work. He continues experimentations with it even in his later works. The theme of permanence of impermanence is expanded and investigated from various perspectives. He deals with permanence of impermanence in all aspects of life making it an important feature of his poetry. His concept is that all of conditioned life, without any exceptions, is transitory. It is in an invariable condition of flux and movement. The mutability of life, a central characteristic of impermanence, is visible in several of his poems. This paper focuses on how he uses visual images to show the permanence of impermanence in his poems.

The spiritual temperament of Yeats gives him an insight into the concept of the permanence of impermanence. He asserted it in a letter written in 1892, "The mystical life is the centre of all that I do & all that I think & all that I write" (Yeats, 1954: p. 303). He makes use of Irish myths and mythologies to portray the phenomenon from a unique angle. His farsighted understanding of the phenomenon of the permanence of impermanence is concealed in his mysticism and occultism. His great philosophical work *A Vision* offers an opportunity to grasp his awareness of this pervasive experience. *A Vision* not only provides a prototype to comprehend earthly transience incidents, but also shows the relationship between his visual imagery and the theme of the permanence of impermanence. He makes use of two important visual images —the Gyres and the Great Wheel to portray impermanence or change, as a fact of all existence. He demonstrates that it is not only an experience of the animate but also applies to inanimate existence, though only the animate feel pain and suffer due to it.

Yeats makes use of the gyres as an image, which is depicted as two cones which go through each other in the poem *A Vision*. These gyres possess antithetical traits and with change one becomes more determining than the other. Change or motion of the gyres show the transience of all things associated with life, the past and the present, the birth and death, the rise and downfall, the flow and recession etc. In "The Gyres" are visual images that symbolize the impermanence of world as they map out the rise and fall of societies and cultures as well as life and death of man. In the first stanza, Yeats stresses everything is impermanent by linking it with the movement. Nothing is permanent. He states:

> The gyres! The gyres! Old Rocky Face, look forth;
> Things thought too long cannot be thought,
> For beauty dies of beauty, worth of worth,
> And ancient lineaments are blotted out. (Yeats, 2008: p. 249)
> He talks of impermanence and change again in the following words:
> A great, a more gracious time has gone;
> …and all things run
> On that unfashionable gyre again. (p. 249)

Change or impermanence is the central attribute of all phenomenal existence in the poems by Yeats. He shows that nothing animate or inanimate can be labeled as lasting as it will definitely undergo change. Everything in the world is transitory. The falcon's turning in the widening gyres is another exquisite visual image created by Yeats, taken from nature in *"The Second Coming":*

> Turning and turning in the widening gyre
> The falcon cannot hear the falconer; (p. 158)

The falcon motion takes it away from the trainer to such an extent that it can't listen to the falconer's voice. Motion causes change and the falcon becomes the visual image of mankind itself that is lost and unable to come to terms with its reality. Yeats also depicts the Tree of Life and Tree of Knowledge as the transformed cones in "The Two Trees". He seems to assert that existence can be understood only if the basic facts are understood, not only logically, but also in agreement with one's own experiences. Insight or wisdom which is the ultimate liberating factor consists of this experience or realization of the permanence of impermanence. To see things as they really are means seeing them time after time in the light of knowledge. Ignorance or self-deception is by itself a potent cause for suffering by being caught in the net of bogus hopes, of idealistic and destructive desires, of fake ideologies, phony values and false endeavors in life man is lost. Ignoring or distorting the basic fact that all life is impermanent can only lead to dissatisfaction, disillusionment, and despondency.

The first stanza of this poem concerns the Tree of Life and the second stanza the Tree of Knowledge. All things in the universe alter between the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge, nothing is eternal:

> The broken wall, the burning roof and tower
> And Agamemnon dead. (p. 182)

Yeats portrays in "Veronica's Napkin", the cross on which Jesus Christ was crucified. The manifestation of this visual image used by Yeats shows the desire for liberation and attainment of permanent glory.

> The Father and His angelic hierarchy
> That made the magnitude and glory there
> Stood in the circuit of a needle's eye.
> Some found a different pole, and where it stood
> A pattern on a napkin dipped in blood.

Nothing is permanent as even permanent structures like the tower in poems written by Yeats become linked to his theme of transience and change. He tackles the theme of transience and impermanence of life in his poem *"In Memory of Major Robert Gregory"*, Yeats declares in *"Blood and the moon"* that:

> I declare this tower is my symbol; I declare
> This widening, gyring, spiring treadmill of a stair is my ancestral stair; (p. 200)

As clearly discernible from the above mentioned lines the tower is a visual image, a symbol for self albeit it too is ever changing "widening, gyring spiring". Yeats looks out from the tower not to a magical enchanted world but an impermanent and transient world that provokes him to think about his reality.

The Great Wheel is another important visual image used by Yeats in *A Vision*. The Great Wheel with twenty-eight spokes, each representing a year set out in lunar months. In this complex visual image every spoke signifies the twenty-eight possible selves, each being a mask of the one opposite. Every soul and every civilization passes through all twenty-eight phases of the wheel. Yeats in *"The Phases of the Moon"* says:

Twenty-and-eight the phases of the moon
The full and the moon's dark and all the crescents
Twenty-and-eight, and yet but six-and-twenty
The cradles that a man must needs be rocked in
For there's no human life at the full or the dark… (p. 138)

The moon itself is a visual image showing the permanence of impermanence. It rules over man's life representing incarnation and change. It depicts mans desire for permanence and perpetuity.

Yeats mentions the idea of The Great Year in "The Wheel":

Through winter time we call on spring,
And through the spring on summer call,
And when abounding hedges ring
Declare that winter's best of all;
And after that there's nothing good
Because the spring-time has not come—
Nor know that what disturbs our blood
Is but its longing for the tomb. (p. 179)

Yeats concern with this theme reminds one of Heraclitus' "There is nothing permanent except change". The determinedly distinguishing thing about the world is its transience. Even centuries have no advantage over the present instant due to their lack of permanence. The continuity of transience cannot give any consolation to man as the seasons change, life changes to death. Poets, painters and musicians struggle at their work, building lawless and lawful things. They exemplify the difference between the permanent and the transient.

Yeats marks the changing nature of life. He sees it and he portrays it with dispassionate discernment. He shows how, though change again and again speaks to them and makes them unhappy; they pursue their mad career of whirling round the wheel of existence and are twisted and torn between the spokes of agony. They treasure the conviction that somehow it will be possible for them to find permanent happiness in this transitory world, to find a core of security in this sphere of impermanence. They visualize that in the vague world they can find certainty and so the insistent struggle for worldly perfection goes on with persevering effort and futile enthusiasm. History has proved and will further prove that nothing in this world is everlasting. All the things that man desperately tries to hold on to are impermanent. Nations and civilizations rise, thrive, and die away as waves upon the deep, yielding place to the novel, and the scrolls of time trace the ephemeral spectacle, the unjustifiable apparition, and the vanishing stream that is civilization.

Yeats asserted that, "these children of the Holy Spirit labor at their moments with eyes upon the shining substance on which Time has heaped the refuse of creation; for the world only exists to be a tale in the ears of coming generations; and terror and content, birth and death, love and hatred, and the fruit of the Tree, are but instruments for that supreme art which is to win us from life and gather us into eternity like doves into their dove-cots." (Yeats, 1959: pp. 300-301). Impermanence means that reality is never static but is dynamic throughout. Yeats portrays this reality of life making use of various forms of visual image in his poems to depict Change and Movement as the Lord of the Universe. Birds' sail in circles in *"The Wild Swans at Coole".* In *"My Descendants"* he states:

> The nineteenth autumn has come upon me
> Since I first made my count;
> I saw, before I had well finished,
> All suddenly mount
> And scatter wheeling in great broken rings
> Upon their clamorous wings. (p. 107)

The above lines describe the frustration and despair at the realization that nothing is permanent, as he continues:

> The Primum Mobile that fashioned us
> Has made the very owls in circles move; (p. 173)

The poet mentions the Primum Mobile, the owls move in circles implying life is a continuous change where nothing is permanent. Movement is life. Life is change. The poet depicts the special dance in *"Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen"*:

> When Loie Fuller's Chinese dancers enwound
> A shining web, a floating ribbon of cloth,
> It seemed that a dragon of air
> Had fallen among dancers, had whirled them round
> Or hurried them off on its own furious path;
> So the Platonic Year
> Whirls out new right and wrong,
> Whirls in the old instead;
> All men are dancers and their tread
> Goes to the barbarous clangor of a gong. (p. 177)

Yeats' notices how change has special function that "whirls out new right and wrong" and "whirls in the old instead". Only change is permanent as the dancers attain the ideal state through circular movement or motion. All things can be crystallized in the single word, impermanence. All tones and clangor of gongs are just variations struck on the chord which is made up of impermanence.

In *Sailing to Byzantium*, Yeats realized "That is no country for old men. The young / in one another's arms, birds in the trees, those dying generations" as he confesses he no longer needs the transient nature of youth and desires something more satisfying. Although the young represented in the poem by William Butler Yeats, "Sailing to Byzantium" are "those dying generations" they are so occupied with their frivolity to appreciate the desire for something permanent. Yeats talks about permanence of impermanence when he mentions the winding path towards the "monuments of un-aging intellect", through the sea of "a dying animal" towards "God's holy fire":

> O sages standing in God's holy fire,
> As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
> Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,
> And be the singing-masters of my soul. (p. 163)

One of literature's chief themes in the twentieth century has been the permanence of impermanence. Permanence and Impermanence receive separate treatment by different authors and from different angles, with a great diversity of approach. Yeats gives striking visual images to illustrate the ephemeral nature of permanence and impermanence. He makes use of visual imagery to portray the permanence of impermanence in all things, the Gyres and the Great Wheel become images of change and impermanence. Yeats deals with the desire for permanence and the pursuit for perpetuity. The fascination with the permanence of impermanence makes his mystical system appear exceptional in English and Irish literature. His prophetic consciousness of permanence of impermanence is disguised in his mystical and occult visual images as the above discussion establishes.

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Mythopoeic Vision of the Apocalypse: Re-interpreting W.B. Yeats's 'The Second Coming'

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> Earth, receive an honored guest;
> William Yeats is laid to rest:
> Let the Irish vessel lie
> Emptied of its poetry.
> —W.H. Auden's eulogy for William Butler Yeats in his dirge 'In Memory of W.B. Yeats'.

In an article, entitled "What W.B. Yeats' 'Second Coming' Really Says About the Iraq War", published in *The New York Times* on February 12, 2007, the columnist Adam Cohen writes:

> "The Brookings Institution, the prominent Washington research organization, just released a report on the Iraq war entitled "Things Fall Apart." When Representative Jim McDermott, Democrat of Washington, took to the House floor last year to demand that President Bush present a plan for Iraq, he called his speech "The Center Cannot Hold." Blogs are full of the observation that "the blood-dimmed tide is loosed" in Iraq these days.

These phrases all come from William Butler Yeats's "The Second Coming." (Cohen, pars. 1-2)

Composed in 1919 and first published in *The Dial* a year later, and then in an anthology named *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* in the year 1921, Yeats's apocalyptic visionary poem 'The Second Coming' is one of the most conspicuous poems in Yeats's oeuvre, and by extension, in the whole of the English literature. It would not be an exaggeration to proclaim that the resonance of the poem is still with us. Such audacious attempts of reading the poem through the lens of contemporary events like that of the Iraq War and so on, is predominantly the offshoot of the modern critical way of reading and interpreting a literary work, which also consolidates Yeats's lasting legacy in the contemporary world.

Writing in the historically turbulent period of the early 20th century when the multifarious cacophonies resulting from the socio-political upheavals on a world-scale phenomena were crying afar, Yeats's 'apocalyptic', almost unobtrusive poem to the literary pundits 'The Second Coming' documents, on the one hand, the contemporary decayed, putrid socio-political milieu of human civilization, and on the other, it makes a prophetic premonition of the eschatological doom of a devastating, disintegrating and degenerating civilization, more specifically of a Christian civilization. So, in a way, a palimpsestic, critical reading of Yeats's 'The Second Coming' can be done by adopting a flashback and flash-forward technique of going to the past, present and future events for interpreting and analyzing a literary text, where the poem is supposed to be mingling the past, present and future events to provide a unified and universal literary appeal for all times. Yeats describes such a degenerated, claustrophobic, post-lapsarian fallen stage of human civilization towards the very beginning of the first stanza of poem:

> Turning and turning in the widening gyre
> The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
> Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;

> Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
> The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
> The ceremony of innocence is drowned; (Yeats, stanza 1, line 1-6)

Composed in the immediate aftermath of the WW-I in 1919, with its large scale massacre and genocide all over the European continent, along with the Russian Revolution where "The old order in Russia had just been toppled by a revolution that Yeats-who had a fondness for aristocracy-feared would spread across the continent and the globe" (Cohen), conjoined with the Irish movement for Independence from the British rule which leads to the frequent violent uprisings (like that of the Easter Rising in 1916), Yeats's 'The Second Coming' serves as a dirge for a disintegrating post-war European culture and civilization. David Holdeman in his seminal book *The Cambridge Introduction to W.B. Yeats* depicts such a predicament as:

> "*The Second Coming* encapsulates the era's mood of crisis." (Holdeman 77)

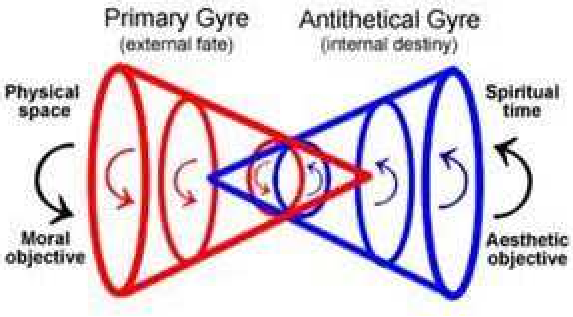
In order to explicate this 'mode of crisis', Holdeman further adds that:

> The combined effects of World War I, the Russian Revolution, and the ongoing turmoil in Ireland suggested that Europe was beginning to witness the chaotic onset of just such a reversal. The resulting poem dramatizes an intensely conflicted state of mind, mingling excitement at the prospect of a new era with horror at the violence its coming will entail. (Holdeman 78)

But unlike most of the modernist writers like T.S. Eliot and James Joyce whose works like 'The Waste Land' and *Ulysses*(both published in the same year in 1922) work as a panacea for the moribund European civilization and hopes for the revival and recuperation of a deteriorating civilization by means of its spiritual reawakening, Yeats's 'The Second Coming' more envisions of a deterministic and fatalistic eschatological ending of the world.

Yeats's 'apocalyptic mystical theories' can further be elucidated by explicating his private myth of 'gyre'. Theorized first in his poem "A Vision", Yeats's 'The Second Coming' incorporates the concept of 'gyre' which is a cyclical rotation of history in a 2000 years interval. This belief propounds that history is always repetitive in a cyclical pattern of two thousand years. Commenting on the geometrical figure of 'gyre', David A. Ross in his book *Critical Companion to William Butler Yeats: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work* expounds that:

> "The underlying "mathematical figure" of "The Second Coming," as Yeats states in a lengthy note to the poem, is the cone or gyre interlocked with its opposite, the vertex of the one centered upon the base of the other." (Ross 219)



(Figure 1: Gyre)[1]

Linking the mathematical figure of 'gyre' to the cyclical pattern of history, David further explains that this geometric figure actually represents the 'ideas of cyclical creation and destruction'. Based on this comment, the myth can be interpreted as to represent a symbolic pattern of the advent of a peaceful age for two thousand years and then the coming of an anarchic age of another two thousand years after its turn. Thus, the beginning of an anarchic age always marks the termination of a cohesive era preceding it. David facilitates the point by putting Yeats's own commentary on it:

> In *A Vision*, Yeats expresses the idea more simply: "After an age of necessity, truth, goodness, mechanism, science, democracy, abstraction, peace, comes an age of freedom, fiction, evil, kindred, art, aristocracy, particularity, war". (Ross 219)

Yeats by incorporating the 'gyre' imagery in this poem, further hypothesizes his apocalyptic vision which goes as- after the completion of 2000 years of Christ's nativity, the pre-lapserian bliss and virtue of the human civilization would be effaced from the world and an expected 'blood-dimmed' 'anarchy' would prevail all over the world immediately afterwards. At this crucial juncture, David's comments would suffice the point and substantiates the argument:

> At the present moment the life gyre [i.e., the objective or primary impulse] is sweeping outward, unlike that before the birth of Christ which was narrowing, and has almost reached its greatest expansion. (Ross 219)

Such a deliberate mythmaking, which is an embodiment of Yeats's vision of the apocalypse, gets further heightened in the course of the poem. Yeats's conviction of the possibility of an eschatological ending of the world for the reasons that the created human-beings no longer reciprocate the calling of their Creator (as symbolized in the 'falcon' imagery 'The falcon cannot hear the falconer ;') or the 'ceremony of innocence is drowned', and the hysterical, hedonistic, blasphemous multitudes no longer believes in the existence of God, is further solidified in the second stanza where Yeats anticipates of the 'revelation' of a 'second-coming' of somebody. Endowed with the profound knowledge of world mythology, this apocalyptic vision of Yeats has its resonance to the essence of *Bhagavad Gita* itself where Lord Krishna (an incarnation of Lord Vishnu in Hindu mythology) reveals to Arjuna the apocalyptic vision of a blasphemous, morally degenerated human civilization for generation after generation:

> "Yada yada hi dharmasya glanirbhavati bharata
> Abhythanamadharmasya tadatmanam srijamyaham"
> "Paritranaya sadhunang vinashay cha dushkritam
> Dharmasangsthapanarthay sambhabami yuge yuge"
> [Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 4, Verse: 7-8]

The English rendering of these verses are:

> "Whenever there is decay of righteousness, O Bharata,
> And there is exaltation of unrighteousness, then I Myself come forth;"
> "For the protection of the good, for the destruction of evil-doers,
> For the sake of firmly establishing righteousness, I am born from age to age."
> [Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 4, Verse: 7-8]

As a result of this, Yeats, in the very first few lines of the second stanza of the poem foresees the prospective forthcoming of the reincarnation of somebody or something, with the hope of putting an end to this degenerating civilization. As Yeats says:

> Surely some revelation is at hand;
> Surely the Second Coming is at hand.

> The Second Coming! (Yeats, Stanza 2 Line 1-3)

In the last chapter of *The New Testament* of the *Bible*, entitled *The Book of Revelation* (also named *The Apocalypse*), the Gospel of John prophesizes the reincarnation of Jesus Christ as a savior of the people in the days of apocalypse. This event, in traditional Christian mythology, is called the 'Second Coming'. As Bible mentions of it when Jesus comforts his disciples by saying:

> Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.[1] In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.[2] And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. [3] (Gospel of John, Ch-14, V-1-3, KJV Bible)

It may apparently seem by looking at the words like the 'revelation' and the 'Second Coming' in the second stanza of the poem or as suggested in the title of the poem that Yeats is here hypothesizing about the Christian eschatological ending of the world and the reincarnation of Jesus Christ as a savior of the people, based on the Biblical myth of the 'second coming'; but a critical understanding of the poem illuminates a different light on it all together. In this poem, Yeats's prophetic vision is not of the Christian one, but rather more of a pagan one. In his book *Yeats's Poetic Codes* (OUP), Nicholas Grene's comments on it will substantiate the point:

> The world stands poised at the point of a second coming, a return of the antithetical phase after the primary phase of the Christian era. And it is to suggest this, perhaps, that Yeats gave the poem the title he did in the form he did. (Grene 27)

Brought up in a dominant Christian family, Yeats had been imbibed with some of the Biblical teachings since his childhood. But since he became fourteen years of age, this faith upon traditional Christianity had been shaken as an result of the socio-political upheavals, along with the rising industrialization, conjoined with the increasing evidence of Darwinian philosophy of evolution which undermines the Biblical teachings. But this does not necessarily mean that he became less spiritual, for the reason that his shifting conviction towards a pagan Celtic belief system provided greater sustenance for him. Taking Irish occultism as the subject-matter of his poetry, he drew more and more inferences from the Irish Celtic mythology. As a result, based on these experimentations, Yeats subverted the traditional Christian myth of the 'second coming' or the reincarnation of Jesus Christ as the savior of the people in the Apocalypse. Rather Yeats foresaw a total submerge of the human civilization through the destructive properties of the advent of a terrible 'Sphinx like creature' which would bring about destruction to the world. As Grene comments that:

> The apparition in the poem is not a Titan nor yet is it brazen or winged. It is closer in form to the Sphinx, the Egyptian male Sphinx, as Richard Ellmann was the First to point out. (Grene 104)

Regarding the portrayal of the human-animal creature mentioned in the second stanza of the poem, Yeats depicts that:

> "…somewhere in sands of the desert
> A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
>
> A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
> Is moving its slow thighs" (Yeats, Stanza 2 Line 5-9)

In his book *The Cambridge Introduction to W.B. Yeats* David Holdeman posits that:

> This poem's immense popularity arises partly from the sheer thrill induced by its blasphemous vision of the stony Egyptian sphinx slouching towards Bethlehem to take the place of Christ, a vision that draws readers into its uncanny interior with three dimensional imagery similar to that of "Easter, 1916" and "On a Political Prisoner". (Holdeman 77)

Such mythopoeia debunks the traditional, dominant Christian myth of the 'second coming' where Christ's reincarnation as a savior of the human being is generally anticipated; but in Yeats's prophetic vision, it is the approach of a more pagan ferocious human-animal like creature that would bring up the death-knell of existing civilization. Much like the creation of Blake's ferocious, destructive creature in the eponymous poem "The Tyger"[2], Yeats's 'beast' is also expected to serve the same function i.e. the total annihilation of a disruptive civilization. Yeats's efficacious myth-making of replacing Christ with a destructive beast is further enunciated in the concluding two lines of this poem:

> And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
> Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born? (Yeats, Stanza 2 Line 13-14)

But a critical reading of the poem suggests that this apparition of a 'rough beast' is not a literal one at the face value, rather it is a metaphorical one which symbolizes the subsequent bloody warfare worldwide to be a wild beast which would disrupt human civilization. In an article entitled *The widening gyre of heavy-handed allusions to Yeats's 'The Second Coming"*, published on April 7, 2015 in *The Parish Review* on the sesquicentennial celebration of Yeats's birth year, the editor Nick Tabor attempts to redefine the eschatological implication of the poem from the contemporary lens of late 20thand early 21st century phenomena. Critically examining the private mythology of Yeats, Nick Tabor postulates that Yeats's vision of the apocalypse starting with the advent of a 'Sphinx'-like 'Narashimha'[3] avatar is in reality actualized by the bloody warfare and violent conflicts worldwide. As Nick writes:

> As for the slouching beast, the best explanation is that it's not a particular political regime, or even fascism itself, but a broader historical force, comprising the technological, the ideological, and the political. A century later, we can see the beast in the atomic bomb, the Holocaust, the regimes of Stalin and Mao, and all manner of systematized atrocity. (Tabor, par 7)

Thus, the attempt to read Yeats's 'The Second Coming' in the context of the historical phenomena of WW-I, WW-II, the Economic Depression of the 30s, Holocaust, the genocide taken up in Israel-Palestinian conflict and other warfare, along with the large-scale massacre in the process of colonization and decolonization, to the topical events like 9/11 and its immediate aftermath of 'War on Terror' with U.S. attacking on Afghanistan and Iraq, to the more recent Middle East uprising, is in congruence with the symptomatic manifestation of Yeats's apocalyptic prediction. Yeats's craftsmanship of cohering history with myth thus provides a great source for its wide-ranging popularity, inspiring later writers to acquire elements from the poem too. One of the monumental masterpieces in the whole of the English literature *Things Fall Apart*(1958), the magnum opus of the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe, is such an example of it. Drawing its title from Yeats's *The Second Coming*, Achebe gives a portrayal of the same kind of apocalyptic vision of a disintegrating Igbo culture and civilization, devastated under the British Colonialism.

Notes:

[1] See "Yeats's System"
[2] See the poem "The Tyger" (1794) in *William Blake, Collected Poems* ed. by W.B. Yeats.
[3] Read Shweta Saxena's article "A mythical interpretation of Yeats' The Second Coming." Pub. In IJEL Vol. 4(1), pp. 17-18, January 2013.

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“Faustian Bargain” in W.B. Yeats’s The Countess Cathleen: Construction and Critique of Irish Nationalism

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Introduction

From the very basal days of its foundation in 1899 (by W.B. Yeats, Lady Gregory and Edward Martin) the Irish Literary Theatre serves as the first formal cornerstone of the Irish Dramatic Movement. With its debut production of Yeats’ *The Countess Cathleen*, the theatre strives to bring together Irish national, religious and socio-political issues and helps to the embodiment and construction of ‘Irish national identity’ but there lies at the same time a sharp appraisal and a nebulous critique of these issues. Set ahistorically in the legendary Celtic world Yeats’ *The Countess Cathleen* presents the sempiternal wrangle between good and evil and the eventual exultation of the good at the cost of self-sacrificial dissolution. In a Pre-Elizabethan English Morality fashion, this verse drama conveys a ‘Faustian bargain’ of bartering the soul of the eponymous Countess for the wellbeing of others. The playwright himself admits that the play was primarily written for Maud Gonne in order to “please her” in his own words and it was subsequently dedicated to her. This paper aims to focus on the dual concerns: how this particular play serves as a tool for the ideological construction of ‘Irish Nationalism’, Irish ‘Hero/Heroine Worship’ and the eventual contour of ‘Irish National Identity’; and on the other hand, it manifests how the implicit and nebulous critique of these principles and beliefs helps to the deconstruction or demythologization of this ‘Irish National Consciousness’.

I

Yeats’ most influential Fenian mentor, John O’ Leary once taught him that: “…there is no fine nationality without literature, and…the converse also, there is no fine literature without nationality”.[1] (Howes & Kelly 19).

Yeats’ all encompassing oeuvre bears testimony to this above mentioned dictum. After establishing himself as a jubilant poet, Yeats undertook his expedition to venture on the terrain of Irish drama. To establish a national theatre where the Irish national, religious, and socio-political issues can be presented, debated and analyzed, was Yeats’ prolonged urge. Conceived, discussed and jointly ventured with Lady Augusta Gregory and Edward Martyn around 1897, Irish Literary Theatre opened up for the first time on May 8, 1899 with Yeats’ groundbreaking play *The Countess Cathleen.* With its debut production, the Irish Literary Theatre brings together the then issues about the nation and nationalism, politics, religion, socio-economy etc. and helps the construction of, what came to be known as ‘Irish National Identity’. But it is also true that at the same time a sharp appraisal and a nebulous critique of these issues coexist side by side.

“National Identity” according to D. George Boyce, as suggested in his introductory chapter “Introduction: Nationalism and Ireland” in his outstanding book *Nationalism in Ireland* is:

> This is felt by members of a group who define their culture as the national one, and their group as the true legitimate inheritors of the national territory, of the homeland (Boyce18).

Thinking in terms of this above mentioned rationale, Yeats’ play ***T****he Countess Cathleen* can be viewed as an epitome of the embodiment and construction of ‘Irish Nationalism’. At the very backbone of the play there lies Yeats' faith in Christian mysticism blended with the long traditional pagan beliefs of Irish folklore and legends. Set ahistorically in the legendary Celtic world Yeats' *The Countess Cathleen* presents the sempiternal wrangle between good and evil and the eventual exultation of the good at the cost of self-sacrificial dissolution. In a Pre-Elizabethan English Morality fashion, this verse drama conveys a 'Faustian bargain' of bartering the soul of the eponymous Countess for the well being of other peasants in a time of famine. This theme is originally based on John Augustus O'Shea's story that Yeats reprinted in his *Fairy and Folk Tales of Irish Peasantry (1888)* about a year ago. Yeats' keen interest in Irish folklore, long pagan ritualistic observances and traditional Irish fairytale helped him in this endeavour.

In the very formal statement affirming the purpose of establishing Irish Literary Theatre, Yeats and Lady Gregory posited that:

> We will show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the *home of an ancient idealism*. We are confident of the support of all Irish people, who are weary of misrepresentation, in carrying out a work that is outside all the political questions that divide us[2] (Schuchard 227). [Emphasis mine]

The representation of Ireland as the "home of ancient idealism" pervades all through the play. There is famine in the very opening scene of the play and Yeats very craftily blends the Irish occult beliefs and Christian mysticism in a single thread. Teigue, a boy of fourteen predicts uncanny omen from his cottage in "old times" as he has observed two owls with human faces. On the other hand, Mary, the mother of Teigue and the wife of Shemus utters that "Mother of God, defend us!" (*The Countess Cathleen* Scene-I), to that statement Teigue repudiates repeating his father's words "God and Mother of God have dropped asleep". (*The Countess Cathleen*, Scene-I).

Three different reactions to a single particular event in the same house symbolically uphold the different opinions and responses divided among different strata of Irish people, which eventually, constructs 'Irish national identity' in disparate plane. All inclusive values coexist side by side that constructs the imaginative and ideological 'nation formation' whether the paganish beliefs of Teigue or the traditional values of the imaginative poet Aleel, or the Christian deistic beliefs of Mary, or the irreligious and a bit atheistic belief of Shemus.

II

> And then a counter-truth filled out its play,
> *The Countess Cathleen* was the name I gave it;
> *She, pity-crazed, had given her soul away*,
> But masterful Heaven had intervened to save it.
> I thought *my dear must her own soul destroy*,
> So did fanaticism and hate enslave it,
> And this brought forth a dream and soon enough
> This *dream* itself had *all my thought and love*.[3] [Emphases mine]

Yeats' 1939 poem *"The Circus Animals' Desertion"* very elaborately illustrates Yeats' own reflections and comments on his previous works. And of course mentioning his *The Countess Cathleen*, in this poem, Yeats very pathetically broods on upon his life-long desire, aspiration, numerous rejections, grievances and ultimate resentment in his relationship with Maud Gonne. The playwright himself in his own *Memoirs*[4], *Collected Letters*[5] and *Autobiographies* admits that the play was primarily written for Maud Gonne, in order to "please her" (*Memoirs* 41) in his own words and it was subsequently dedicated to her. The "pity-crazed" Countess "who had given her soul away" is none but solely based on the real life character of Gonne. The Countess' act of saving the lives of poor peasants of Ireland from the rapacious merchants first by giving her wealth and possessions and then finally by bartering her own soul makes her undoubtedly a 'heroic figure'. Her undertaken self-sacrifice for the wellbeing of others at the time of great crisis of Irish famine makes her 'legendary heroine', a stock character and a 'sacrificial scapegoat' found in Irish myth and Irish legend, Irish history and folklore.

It is undoubtedly true that the play *The Countess Cathleen* is written for and subsequently dedicated to Maud Gonne. Gonne's audacious deeds in the Anti-British movements, revolutions throughout the 1890s and her profound exertion to resist the cultural distinctiveness of the Irish soil made her truly 'heroic' in the then national and political scenario. The gradual emergence of Gonne as a 'truly' Irish nationalist who dare to face any obstacle for the Irish National cause, has fixity among the Irish minds and this extraordinary zeal and fervor can be seen in the figure of the Countess in the course of the play. The Countess Cathleen's frantic and anxious wandering in her survey of the damage that the famine has done to the Irish people and her act of distributing money among the poor and her initial words established her as a sympathetic, benevolent leader figure:

> Cathleen: I gave for all and that was all I had. Look, my purse is empty. I have passed By starving men and women all this day, And they have had the rest; but take the purse, The silver clasps on't may be worth a trifle. But if you'll come to-morrow to my house You shall have twice the sum. (Yeats Scene 1)

Cathleen's generosity in distributing the money and her daring endeavour to sacrifice her soul for the well-being of Irish famine-stricken peasants biographically connote Maud Gonne's aid to the West Ireland's famine stricken peasants. This relation between the Countess and Gonne and the corollary construction of 'Irish Nationalism' are very acutely observed by Joseph M. Hassett in his famous book *W.B. Yeats and The Muse*:

> This conjunction of a beautiful woman, the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy that governed Ireland, and a penchant for *Irish nationalism* meshed perfectly with *Yeats's goal of creating a national literatu*re that would define a *new Irish consciousness*. (Hassett 69) [Emphases mine]

So, again Yeats' endeavour to create "a nation literature that would define a new Irish consciousness" the symbolic figure of the Countess Cathleen is very much important, desired and finally served his purpose.

The relationship and encounter between Cathleen and the lover-poet Aleel somehow are biographically connected with Maud Gonne and Yeats himself. In the course of the play we find the love-sicken Aleel accompanies the Countess all the way and in Scene III, we find Aleel proposes her love for Cathleen. But Cathleen's effete refusal and decline for some greater nationalistic cause again has an autobiographical alliance. To quote Ross: "Cathleen's tender dismissal of the lovesick poet Aleel thus assumes an obvious autobiographical dimension". (Ross 318)

In the very same way Gonne also refused to accept Yeats's proposal many times for some vague reasons but in her final rejection of Yeats's marriage proposal (before marrying John MacBride) she gave reasons that Yeats was insufficiently deficient in his radical nationalism for Irish cause and for his unwillingness to convert or revert to Catholicism, the predominant religion for the majoritarian Irish public.

So, once again it can be observed that the figures such as Cathleen (in real life Maud Gonne) partake in the construction of 'Irish Nationalism' through the crest of Irish Hero/Heroine worship. That's why in spite of being tempted by the idyllic vision of Allel's company as a temporal isolated respite, Cathleen can never ever forgo her duty and vows that she will stay and pray until her heart has "grown to Heaven like a tree, and there Rustled its leaves, till Heaven has saved my people." (Yeats Scene III) This makes her truly 'heroic' and capable of being 'worshiped' by the Irish peasants.

III

There is rarely any famous text in the world literature which does not have its scanty criticism or slight denigration. The same is evident regarding this play because the construction of 'Irish National Identity' and at the same time sharp appraisal and a nebulous critique of these constructions coexist side by side. When it opened up for the first performance on May 8, 1899 there were famous persons or personalities like William Archer, Lady Gregory, the novelist George Moore,*Saturday Review* reporters like- Max Beerbohm and Arthur Symons and last but not the least young James Joyce among its audiences who all witnessed–

> a loud interruption came from a group of middle-class Catholic students from Royal University, described by Joseph Holloway, Dublin's inveterate theatregoer and journal keeper, as "an organised claque of about twenty brainless, beardless, idiotic-looking youths" who "did all they knew to interfere with the progress of the play by their meaningless automatic hissing & senseless comments, & succeeded (happily) in showing what poor things mortals can become when the seat of reason is knocked awry by animus, spite & bigotry.[6] (Schuchard 62)

What was this clamour for? In what sense had it effected the Irish sentiment chiefly Catholic? These are fundamental questions that need to be emphasized and answered. Even a cardinal had given a verdict that no Catholic should see such play.

It is true that the play overtly presents the Irish peasants who gave acquiesce to let their souls be sold out in the face of pandemic famine for some gold as the last viable way of self-survival. And of course their souls are being auctioned and sold out by the covetous merchants at different prices because each individual soul has its own different prices. But "that said soul" as has been discerned by Adrian Frazer:

> came at different prices, and that illustrated as features of *Irish life some peasants who stole, some who committed sacrilege, and one woman hell-bent on fornication.* (Frazier 2) [Emphases mine]

This representation of Irish peasants and common folk by Yeats is the core kernel of discord, controversy, discontentment and eventual rumpus of the Catholic believers. Of course the play is fundamentally a significant document "in the coming to consciousness of the Irish nation" (Frazier 3) but at the same time a nebulous critique of the construction of these 'consciousness' exist beside. Yeats' implicit irony and satire (as has been later espied in Synge and Joyce) in this play help to deconstruct the Irish national myth that claimed that –

> their men were brave, their women pure, and their people pious. Scholars have usually followed the writers in mocking these claims, saying that the nationalists were puritans, chauvinists, and philistines. (Frazier 6-7)

Obviously, the Countess first agrees to give all the material possession she had and finally agrees to barter her soul for the well-being of other peasants at the crucial time of famine but one can question the root cause of famine. Frazier's insightful observation of the historical trace can be relevant at this juncture:

The Famine came in a fashion that seemed to many a punishment for having too many children, and, with the help of Jansenist theology and Victorian morality, it brought about a truly

> virginal nation. By the end of the nineteenth century the purity of Ireland's women had become a plank in the nationalist program: every province is bound to be thought of as a slut? Ireland alone, though poor, was pure. Critics may mock the status of chastity as a virtue, but one cannot deny its importance both to Irish nationalist thought and in Irish behavior. (Frazier 7)

The prime contention and the apple of discord of the Catholic members lies in the question that can the soul be bartered in such a way? In the play we find that the highest price any Irish peasant's soul brings that of the old ugly woman is two hundred crowns compared with the soul of the beautiful Countess, for whose soul the merchants are ready to pay five hundred thousand crowns. Again, the Countess, the epitome of 'Irish heroine' is not free from sharp criticism. In the very opening scene the Countess enters the cottage of the old man accompanied by a lutanist and other musicians even at the time of plague famine and this causes the "bad peasant" Shemus to growl- "Who's passing there? And mocking us with music?" or "What music! Music!" (Yeats Scene I). If we consider this expression of Shemus as ironic, then one can question the Countess' foolery of entering the cottage with musical accompaniment which is absurd in such a situation like that. Again, the Countess Cathleen' haphazard and erratic wandering and her 'empty purse' hardly make any sense.

Although Yeats had denied several times the association between the setting of the play and the actual historical Irish Famine, but one cannot deny the fact that "In the play famine is the premise from start to finish". (Frazier 12)

What is the nature of the famine? Is it natural or artificially created? In Scene III of the play when the gardener informs Cathleen that the hungry peasants are stealing the apples from her garden and from the herdsman they have rustled her sheep, the Countess resolutely gives her consent to her gardener to let the peasants take away what they want from her garden. On the one hand this generosity of her craves 'Irish hero/heroine worship' but on the other hand it is problematic as well. Fraizer's insightful observation at this point is worth noting:

> This recognition that her wealth can save them is only a short step from another perception for the peasants: the countess creates the Famine – her immense wealth causes their poverty. But before this perception can break upon the mind, Yeats turns the tale so that the countess is not the villain, but the supernatural donor, and then, more than the donor, the tale's one true hero. The shape of the play's plot makes a compelling depiction of the masses as helplessly dependent. (Frazier 13)

IV

So, in a postmodern fashion, the play diligently serves as a tool for the construction of 'Irish Nationalism' but at the same time a non-national and anti-religious approach towards the Irish historiography and established religious help to demythologize the bigotry of 'Irish Nationalism'. Cathleen's benevolent self-sacrificial concern for the wellbeing of others and her foolery or melodramatic 'national consciousness', these two stances coexist side by side. In the real life character of Maud Gonne as well as has been observed by David Holderman, Yeats saw –

> A fiery advocate of physical-force nationalism, Gonne made speeches, organized protests, and, generally speaking, did everything she could to hasten the overthrow of British rule. This combination of qualities encouraged Yeats to see her as an *heroic symbol of an idealized Ireland*. (Holderman 13) [Emphasis mine]

But at the same time Maud Gonne's excessive patriotic zeal was questionable and susceptive to Yeats to certain extent.

Conclusion

In conclusion I would like to point out Holderman's observation of how the play effects the Irish people be it Maud Gonne, Yeats or the other common folk. Though the slight appraisal or a nebulous critique and criticism exist, one cannot deny the fact that the play serves as a tool for the embodiment of the 'Irish National Consciousness' and with its very first performance in the Irish Literary Theatre, it had to go for a long run. Holderman very minutely points out that:

> The resulting play [*The Countess Cathleen*] offers her [Maud Gonne] – and Ireland – both tribute and instruction. To Ireland, it presents an anti-materialist, nationalist fable celebrating the native spiritual traditions that Yeats portrays as the nation's best defense against demons appearing in the guise of mercenary foreigners. At the same time, by stressing Cathleen's dual allegiance to her Christian servant, Oona, and the pagan poet, Aleel, it imagines Irish spirituality as including both orthodox and unorthodox elements, an implication that provoked controversy when it reached the stage in 1899. To Gonne, it offers the flattery of its unstated comparison between her own selfless efforts and those of the noble Cathleen. (Holderman 13)

Notes:

1. See the *Letters to the New Island*. Ed. George Bornstein and Hugh Witemeyer. London and New York: Macmillan, 1989.
2. Written at Coole in the summer of 1897, the signatories, in Lady Gregory's hand, were Yeats, Standish O'Grady, Edward Martyn, George Moore, and William Sharp (for whose sake the word "Celtic" was added, though his plays were never acted by the Irish theatre).
3. See the poem "The Circus Animals' Desertion" (1939) Lines 17-24 in his *Last Poems, The Collected Poems* by W.B. Yeats
4. Yeats, W. B. *Memoirs*. Edited by Denis Donoghue. New York: Macmillan Company, 1973. P. 41
5. Yeats, W. B. *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats. Vol. 1*. Ed. John Kelly and Eric Domville. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986. P. 142
6. Joseph Holloway, unpublished journal, "Impressions of a Dublin Playgoer," this entry included but mistranscribed in Joseph Holloway's *Abbey Theatre: A Selection from his Unpublished Journal*, ed. Robert Hogan and Michael J. O'Neill. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967. P.6

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Vision of Birds: A Comparative Study of Yeats's Swans and Hughes's Hawk

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A close look into the poems "The Wild Swans at Coole" from the volume bearing the same name and "The Hawk in the Rain", from *The Hawk in the Rain* reveals a similarity — the persona watching birds; in the case of Yeats a flock of swans swimming and in the case of Hughes a lonely hawk soaring in the sky. The poems reveal some sort of turmoil that both the personae encounter in their own way. The settings of the poems are strikingly different; Yeats's persona, who is undoubtedly the poet himself, is in the placid surroundings of Coole Park, while the man in "The Hawk in the Rain" is out in the midst of wild Nature trying to fend off the torrential rain and storm.

The period between 1917 and 1919 when the title poem of the volume *The Wild Swans at Coole* was written and again reorganized, was a significant period in Yeats's life. The political turmoil in the country owing to the 1916 uprising, the turning down of Yeats's proposal by Iseult Gonne following his years of failed courtship with Iseult's mother, Maud and his realisation that the autumns of his life were fast fleeting away had so shaped his mental state that the vision of the swans evoked strangely a state of despair and solace at the same time. The very opening stanza brings out the image of timelessness and eternity through the lines: "Mirrors a still sky; / Upon the brimming water . . . ." (Yeats 64). And within this timeless eternity are placed the "nine-and-fifty swans." (Yeats 64). Yeats who had great knowledge about the Irish and Celtic myths deliberately preferred the antique Middle English way of counting in order to give a mythic shape to his vision of the swans. Anybody well acquainted with the Irish ballads and folk literature would be able to trace the link of the fifty-nine swans to the fifty-nine silver bells hanging on the side of the Queen of Elfland's horse[1] in the popular Irish Ballad "Thomas Rymer and the Queen of Elfland". Through this deliberate attempt the poet possibly equated the persona with Rymer and the swans with the Queen of Elfland. It is an attempt to reach a mental solace on the part of the poet, very much like the escapist traits of the Romantics to remain oblivious of the present state, an aging poet torn by personal and social problems. Like Thomas Rymer's flight to the immortal world of the Queen of Elfland, it is the wishful thinking of the persona to be carried off to the ever immutable world of the world of the happy swans. But like Keats in "Ode to a Nightingale", who could not forget his forlorn state inspite of his sojourn into the fanciful world of the nightingale, the persona here as he mentions the fifty-nine swans is immediately reminded: "The nineteenth autumn has come upon me / Since I first made my count;" (Yeats 64). He is aging, his "Decrepit age" is being tied to him "As to a dog's tail" (Yeats 105). He knows that there is no escape from the flux of time and that is why before the count is "well finished / All suddenly mount / And scatter wheeling in great broken rings / Upon their clamorous wings." (Yeats 64). The three words with negative connotations "scatter", "broken", "clamorous" have fore grounded the state of suffering in his life. This state is not only due to his awareness of the axe of time, but is more intensely due to his state of loneliness resulting from his failed relationship. Stéphanie Noirard comparing the poet's state with the loneliness and isolation of the Lady in Tennyson's *The Lady of Shallot* points out that "it is no coincidence that the persona should see "nine-and-fifty" — as opposed to fifty-eight — swans and that the reality he experiences after they have scatter[red] wheeling in great broken rings" should make his heart feel "sore.""[2] The hint is clear enough, the fifty-ninth swan is lonely, and therefore is never a party to the other swans in pair and be "Unwearied still, lover by lover". (Yeats 64).

The stanzaic ordering of the 1917 version was different from the present one. The third stanza was the last stanza in the 1917 version and through that he presented a defeated image of himself. The expression "Unwearied" state of the swans betrays the subjective condition of the persona revealing his wearied broken down state. The swans paddle in the "cold" water with ease. The word "cold" again carries a negative connotation and it rings in the reader's ears reminding him of the cold, loveless, aging state of the poet. "Their hearts have not grown old", obviously tunes the readers' mind to that recurrent image in Yeatsean poetry — the image of the poet aging poet. In this poem through the line "The nineteenth autumn has come upon me", and in others, as in "Sailing to Byzantium", "Consume my heart away; sick with desire / And fastened to a dying animal" (Yeats 105), or perhaps the most forceful of such images, "Decrepit age that has been tied to me / As to a dog's tail" ("The Tower"), the poet is time and again surfacing his same aversion for his growing age and in contrast his passion for eternity of which he cannot be a part. The image of the golden nightingale that the poet created much later in "Sailing to Byzantium" (1927) is a step towards that eternity. The swans however in this poem serve a better option than his latter creation. By reordering the stanzas, the poet had accepted one thing that it is not important whether he remains immortal or not as he tried to do later, through the tour-de-force of the clockwork golden nightingale singing forever to the Byzantine people, "Of what is past, or passing, or to come" (Yeats 105), what is important is that love becomes immortal, love becomes universal. The flesh and blood life of the poet or that of a particular swan is immaterial. The swans in the last stanza become beautiful with the mysticism of love. So these love birds would forever continue to "Delight men's eyes" (Yeats 64) wherever and however they may be. The broadening of the poet's mental spectrum, the personal becoming transpersonal overcoming his personal sorrow is a new realisation, a transcendence which has taken the poem to a higher level.

Unlike Yeats, the poetic background of Ted Hughes was not marked with social, political or personal problems, at least when he wrote his first volume *The Hawk in the Rain*. Hughes from a very early stage in his life was greatly influenced by Robert Graves's *The White Goddess*, a book believed to have shaped his understanding regarding the pervading presence of a Mother element, manifested as Nature. However it would be better to see Graves's book just as an inspiration because Hughes was spiritually inclined to feel the presence of the Goddess even before reading Graves's book. Hughes's "Song" written two years before his reading of Graves's book was a hymn to Muse Goddess. In fact while reading *The White Goddess* for the first time he felt, as he wrote in a letter to Nick Gammage, "slight resentment to find [Graves] taking possession of what I considered to be my secret patch."[3]

It is of important to know what shape the realisation of Nature had taken in Hughes's mind. This would help in understanding the relationship of the soaring hawk and the persona referred to as "I" in "The Hawk in the Rain". In "The Wild Swans at Coole" the "paddling" swans and the persona in accordance with the romantic tradition share a personal relationship. The swans become the spur for all the feelings of the poet. But the hawk flying and the man in the field at no level share any personal relationship with the poet. As in Yeats, the man here too watches the hawk. The hawk is the epitome of perfection, "Effortlessly at height hangs his still eye. / His wings hold all creation in a weightless quiet, / Steady as a hallucination in the streaming air." (Hughes 11). The man on the other hand flounders as one drowning in the sea, "completely overwhelmed by the elements."[4] The earth where the persona is standing is like a "dogged grave" (Hughes 11) and he is nothing more than a "Morsel in the earth's mouth" (Hughes 11), counting his last. In comparison to the helpless state of existence of the persona, the hawk whose "diamond point of will" (Hughes 11) is as steady as the polestar and who can hang still at "the master- / Fulcrum of violence" (Hughes 11) is symbolically at a level much higher than the struggling weather beaten man. Keith Sagar remarks as he opens his discussion of the poem: ""The Hawk in the Rain" stands appropriately at the threshold of the book, for it announces the major themes — man in relation to animals, the weather, time and mortality."[5] This is true not only for this volume but for the volume that follows, that is, *Lupercal* which also includes similar themes. The animal poems "The Hawk in the Rain", "The Jaguar", "The Horses", "Pike", "Thrushes" and the non-animal poems like "Wind", "October Dawn", "Snowdrop" all express man's relation to Nature. Hughes felt that the human civilization particularly the western world was fast moving away from Nature. In his "Environmental Revolution" Hughes wrote that "the story of the mind exiled from Nature is the story of Western Man."[6] The animals, the hawk, the macaw, the jaguar, the bull, the pike are true representatives of Nature. Regarding the majestic hawk in "Hawk Roosting" Hughes said in his famous interview to Ekbert Faas:

> That bird is accused of being a fascist . . . the symbol of some horrible totalitarian genocidal dictator. Actually what I had in mind was that in this hawk Nature is thinking. Simply Nature. It's not so simple may be because Nature is no longer so simple. I intended some Creator like the Jehovah in Job but more feminine. When Christianity kicked the devil out of Job what they actually kicked out was Nature . . . and Nature became the devil. He doesn't sound like Isis, mother of the gods, which he is. He sounds like Hitler's familiar spirit.[7]

The hawk soaring high is actually this true face of Nature and therefore can remain still at the "master- / Fulcrum of violence" (Hughes 11). On the other hand it seems to the persona that the earth which created mankind (Genesis 3:19) is like a "dogged grave" (Hughes 11). This is because modern man has so much distanced himself from Nature that he no longer remains a part of Her. Again, the persona feels that the elements of Nature, in this case the hawk, can exist not only with quietude even at the core of violence, but chooses his hour of death willingly.

> That maybe in his own time meets the weather
> Coming the wrong way, suffers the air, hurled upside down,
> Fall from his eye, the ponderous shires crash on him,
> The horizon trap him; the round angelic eye
> Smashed, mix his heart's blood with the mire of the land. (Hughes 11).

This mixing of the hawk's blood with the earth gains greater significance when various mythological aspects are considered. Many North Indian and Jewish legends believed that blood contained the life and spirit of the beast.[8] So spilling of blood enhanced greater crop production. The hawk then is not only an aspect of Nature, but one whose life force can enrich the earth. And what is important, in contrast to the man who shirks from earth, the hawk willingly performs self sacrifice for the enrichment of the earth.

The swans of Yeats symbolise universal love, youth and an emblem of peace and saturation in life. The sight of the swans and their fancied disappearance affect the mental state of the persona and at the same time instil a realisation, a greater understanding of the meaning of life. But the hawk in Hughes's poem is the symbol of Nature. The persona unlike Yeats's feels no personal attachment towards the bird. This is because the hawk is not just a bird but a representative of Nature from whom modern man has moved away. It is for this reason the reader cannot feel any connection between the hawk and the man. They are two separate entities who have distanced themselves.

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Yeats's "No Second Troy": A Reworking of the Hellenic Myth

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> "Was this the face that launched a thousand ships?
> And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?
> Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss."
> — Marlowe: *Dr. Faustus* (v.i. 99-101).

> "Helen, whose beauty summoned Greece to arms
> And drew a thousand ship to Tenedos"
> —- Marlowe: *Tamburlaine II*(II.iv. 87-88)

> "Helen, thy beauty is to me
> Like those Nicéan barks of yore,
> That gently, o'er a perfumed sea,
> The weary, way-worn wanderer bore
> To his own native shore."– Poe: *To Helen*

Since the days when Marlowe (1564-'93) studied the classics at Cambridge, Helen, historically a destructive wanton, and dramatically a demonic phantom, in terms appropriate for the female wisdom figure, retained in Christian theology as a created analogue for Christ, the second person of the Trinity, had been his cynosure of comparison — comparison with*Tamburlaine* (1590) and even with Gaveston in *Edward II* (1592). But metaphor is never enough for Marlowe; he must have the real thing, beauty in person; in *The Jew of Malta* (1592) policy was personified by Machiavelli himself, and the consummation of Faustus's desire — or the consolation, at any rate, for his regret — is to have Helen as his paramour. To sum up the classical myth: Menelaus, one of the many kings to rule Greece, had a beautiful wife, Helen. She was abducted by the beautiful but cowardly Trojan Prince, Paris, one of the fifty sons of King Priam of Troy, who took her to Troy. The Greeks, led by Menelaus's brother Agamemnon, the High King, laid siege to Troy, but the city held out for ten years, until the Trojan horse, containing the Greek soldiers, was introduced to the city. Thus, the Trojans were butchered and battered "on the threshold of their undone years" and "the topless towers of Ilium" were destroyed "on the ringing plains of windy Troy". Helen , Western's culture prime example of the catastrophic social consequences of private obsession, appears in Shakespeare (1564 – 1616) too:

> "Why, she [Helen of Troy] is a pearl
> Whose price hath launched above a thousand ships
> And turned crowned kings to merchants"
> (*Troilus and Cressida,* II. ii. 81-83).

Richard II, the son of York, identifies himself with the damned Faustus; or rather, like Faustus in his concluding speech, his reflexions oscillate between the visions of Heaven and Hell, and the shadow of Helen stresses the sensuality in Richard's narcissism. "No Second Troy" (1908), Yeats's most powerful blending so far of mythological, ironic contemporary passion, epigrammatic expression and glowing verse, incorporates this classical myth, but with this difference that Yeats radically modifies the image of Helen: from a sex object over whom men fight their battles to a warrior that she herself becomes, previously identified by the smile of the bow as an Amazon.

Yeats's active syntax attributes to her the agency of a subject: instead of causing Troy to be destroyed, she burns it herself. Yeats expresses his nationalism when he remarks, "We are what we are because almost without exception we have had some part in public life in a country where public life is simple and exciting" (1936: XV-XVI).

Maud Gonne had always been a political activist, but the younger Yeats's preferred to represent her as a static avatar of Eternal Beauty or an un-individualized Rose. Yeats notes, "Her beauty, backed by her great stature, could instantly affect an assembly, and not, as often with our stage beauties, because obvious and florid, for it was incredibly distinguished, and if—as must be that it might seem that assembly's very self, like the face of some Greek statue, showed little thought, her whole body seemed a master-work of long labouring thought, as though a Scopas has measured and calculated, consorted with Egyptian sages, and mathematicians out of Babylon, that he might outface even Artemisia's sepulchral image with a living norm" (1995: 364-365). Although "No Second Troy" celebrates her as unique, her beauty "solitary" in a banal age, Yeats's representation of femininity in the poem draws energy from women who have adopted mass protest, offering the spectacle of a world turned upside down, the little streets hurled upon the great:

"Why should I blame her that she filled my days
With misery, or that she would of late
Have taught to ignorant men most violent ways,
Or hurled the little streets upon the great,
Had they but courage equal to desire?" (*VP* 256-257).

The opening of "No Second Troy" has something more positive than an acceptance of the sadness caused by the earlier relationship. "Words" has shown how the nature of the relationship was necessary to the writing of the poetry; "No Second Troy" makes Maud Gonne a symbol of the nobility of a passed heroic age, and so sets up an image to which the present might aspire, or at least points to lack within the present age.

"No Second Troy" indicates that for Yeats as speaker, poetic "manliness" meant giving up the abject laments of the forsaken lover. Why should we blame her for rejecting him? "Manly" poetics consisted in the elliptical condensation of syntax, the replacement of parataxis by subordination, strong enjambment, stress-packed lines, colloquial diction, and emphasis on consonants rather than vowels: in the construction of an energetic spoken language. Voice, energy, and agency have traditionally been denied to women, and Yeats sees Maud Gonne as a heroic woman who lacked a tragic stage on which to speak her "mind". Gonne, in "No Second Troy", becomes the very type of the heroic misplaced in an unheroic age: "a kind / That is not natural in an age like this" (*VP* 256-257). There is a similar sense of the struggle of the imagination to capture the legendary beauty of the young Maud Gonne, latter -day avatar of the Homeric Helen, in "Peace" (1910):

"All that sternness amid charm,
All that sweetness amid strength" (*VP* 259).

The poetic elevation of the original sonnet heroines, Beatrice and Laura, reflected no social power. Yeats's Helen, however, has taken power into her own hands: if she is "high" above the poet it is because she has placed herself there. She transgresses all the stereotypes of femininity, she is violent, courageous, noble, fiery, solitary, and stern; her beauty is a weapon rather than a lure:

" What could have made her peaceful with a mind
That nobleness made simple as a fire,

With beauty like a tightened bow, a kind
That is not natural in an age like this,
Being high and solitary and most stern?" (*VP* 256-257).

Yeats did not believe in violent rebellion, and afterward he wrote one of his most famous and painful poems, "Easter 1916", in which he declared, " A terrible beauty is born".

From one point of view an elaborate compliment that exalts Maud Gonne by condemning the modern world as inadequate to the second Helen (the modern world contains "No Second Troy"), the poem also implicitly identifies Yeats as no second Paris — a self -deprecating gesture indeed if Yeats accepts Gonne's primitive version of heroism, but a rather self-congratulating gesture if Yeats is criticizing Gonne's inability— "being what she is" — to recognize the modern Juan's different form of heroism — the heroism of the artist's intellectual endeavour. The political point Yeats ends up indirectly making is similar to the point made about Maud Gonne in "No Second Troy" — there is no second Troy to burn: "Was there another Troy for her to burn?" (*VP* 256-257). Yeats justifies Gonne's incitement of violence by suggesting that something in her beauty — as in Helen of Troy — inexorably sowed the seeds of violence. The conjunction of Gonne, Helen, and violence cannot be read apart from "Leda and the Swan" (1923), in which Yeats suggests that Zeus's rape of Leda led not only to the birth of the beautiful Helen ("the only paragon of excellence"), but to the violent sack of Troy and even the murder of Agamemnon at the hands of his wife Clytemnestra:

"A shudder in the loins engenders there
The broken wall, the burning roof and tower
And Agamemnon dead".

There is a temptation to see Gonne's attraction to violence as only oratorical and Yeats's, justification of it as only theoretical, casting Leda's rape as a metaphor for the violence attendant upon the periodic influxes of the divine into history described in *A Vision.* But by the time of "No Second Troy", Gonne had sought to further an Irish Republican Brotherhood plot to blow up British troop ships during the Boer war in 1899 and had acquiesced in MacBride's aborted plan to assassinate king Edward VII (1901-'10) during their honeymoon in Gibraltar. Whereas Helen seems to have played at most a passive role in role in the destruction of Troy, Gonne's affinity for violence was not only active, but part of her appeal. By analogizing Gonne to Helen, whose name was a variant of Selene, the Moon Goddess, and who was inhabited by the Wisdom principle, Yeats at once casts Gonne as a White Goddess and links her penchant for violence with her unnatural beauty and the divine violence that engendered Helen's birth.

"No Second Troy", a piece of *The Green Helmet and Other Poems* (1910) volume, is nevertheless an ambiguous poem, in which the celebration of Amazonian female agency and power is qualified by the poet's restrictions on the exercise of that power. Foucault notes, "Power prescribes an 'order' for sex that operates at the same time as a form of intelligibility: sex is to be deciphered on the basis of its relation to the law" (1979: 83). Gonne lived in an age that, according to Yeats, afforded no fitting outlet for the energy of the heroic woman. Revolution, whether nationalist or feminist, was not an appropriate activity for a Helen. Thus the lyric takes back with one hand what it gives with the other : the exceptional woman is acknowledged, but her freedom to constitute herself as a subject through political action is denied, and her frustrated power is defined as destructive. When in old age Yeats lamented the fact that he had known

"A Helen of social welfare dream,
Climb on a wagonette to scream" (*VP* 626),

He abandoned creative ambivalence and drew instead on anti-suffrage propaganda, which commonly deployed the nineteenth- century stereotype of the hysterical woman. Daniel Albright remarks, it is Maud Gonne to whom Yeats generally reserved the name Helen" (1994: 804).

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A Missing Link in the Chain: W. B. Yeats, Mysticism and "Sailing to Byzantium"

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W. B. Yeats's oeuvre, especially his poetry, is studied as a part of courses on Modernism and Irish Literature all over the world. However, despite being in the mainstream English Literature Syllabi, Yeats's mystical aspect is not given serious academic attention, both in terms of teaching and learning, which, according to my research, is essential for a better, more comprehensive understanding of the poetic-artistic persona of Yeats. It is a fact beyond reasonable doubt that mysticism was an integral, indispensible part of who Yeats was and what he wrote. In his oft-quoted line from a letter to John O'Leary (1892), Yeats wrote: "The mystical life is at the centre of all that I do and all that I think and all that I write." But, in an act which almost undermines this key to the understanding of the towering personality and creative rigour of Yeats, what one usually encounters in the academic arena is that Yeats's literary works are analyzed and explained through theories that give little or no space to his mystical aspect. Only at the level of independent research has the mystical aspect of Yeats always fascinated writers and critics, because it projects a different persona of Yeats, which is still, in some ways, beyond theoretical analysis and logical explanation.

In the view of T. S. Eliot, something about his contemporary was unusual and inexplicable:

> Mr. Yeats's mind is a mind in some way independent of experience; and anything that occurs in that mind is of equal importance. It is a mind in which perception of fact, and feeling and thinking are all a little different from ours. (Cowell 11).

What Eliot was possibly pointing towards in calling Yeats's mind "independent of experience" was, broadly speaking, the fact that the poetical experiences of a writer are always independent of day-to-day experiences, and particularly in the case of Yeats, they were all the more different because they had the unexplained mystical elements in them.

Now, mystical consciousness, when interpreted along different lines of contemporary theories, turns out to be an attempt to draw a boundary around a writer's limitless imaginative flight. The thrust of this argument is, thus, not the perennial argument of applicability and usefulness of theories, but a critical engagement with the mystical consciousness of a writer and national history vis-à-vis his artistic and literary works. Especially in case of writers like W. B. Yeats, whose breadth of artistic/poetic imagination is such that it imports images and symbols from history (both Irish and World history), contemporary world view (in the sense of both political and philosophical ideas) and his own mystical and prophetic visions in order to articulate the existential quest of mankind and translate it into poetry, literature, and art.

In trying to study the hitherto unexplored, the methodological problem that one encounters is the use of traditional theoretical approaches to explain and establish one's point. On the one hand, the subtlety of human consciousness gives rise to art and literature which are universal in their appeal, but on the other hand, the application of theories make them more objective and rationally appealing in their approach. But because mystical consciousness conceives ideas from different layers of history and time, thus defying spatial and temporal limits, how is it possible to analyze it with the yardstick of a theory, which has a confined space and time-frame to exercise its views?

Throughout the oeuvre of Yeats, one finds an urge in the writer's consciousness to create an absolute national identity. After coming into contact with various mystical societies like the Psychical Research Society, the Order of the Golden Dawn, and the Theosophical Society, to name a few, Yeats started to explore the representation of Irish folklore, myths, and people's history in his literary works through the medium of mystical images and symbols as an expression of the idea of Irishness, and also the problems and existential anxieties facing mankind in general.

Being a painter, poet, mystic and politician, Yeats always delved into the literary terrain where poetry, mysticism and national pursuit intertwined, to give rise to such poems like "Sailing to Byzantium," "Leda and the Swan," "The Second Coming," and "Among School Children," to cite a few. The images and symbols in these poems are so powerful that they force one to think about the real, deeper meaning of life, culture and tradition. Taking specially the case of "Sailing to Byzantium" (1927), one discerns that on a symbolic level, the image of an old man represents the old Irish culture, while the new/modern culture is portrayed through the symbol of the young generation: "An aged man is but a paltry thing,/ A tattered coat upon a stick, unless/ Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing/ for every tatter in its mortal dress " (Yeats 163) . Yeats intertwined these symbols with his mystical experiences to express his own psychological turmoil about existence in a poetical-philosophical manner. The element of a vision, a prophecy, makes his take on history, art, culture and tradition, different from other modernist writers/poets. These lines are indicative of the possibility that our historical consciousness is the soul of our creativity, and the aged man represents art and literature (which, in turn, take shape out of the very same historical consciousness) of the present. Yeats's image of the 'clapping of the soul' shows the creative power of historical consciousness, which is beyond the periphery of disintegration. One must remember that Yeats' active involvement in the Irish revival movement and his mystical pursuit gave a different shade to his poetry. In this poem, the poet's emphasis on the symbol of the '[m]onuments of unageing intellect' projects his mystical realization that one's ancient culture and timeless traditions are eternal sources of creative inspiration. Later on in the poem, Yeats writes, "[a]nd be the singing-masters of my soul./ Consume my heart away; sick with desire/ And fastened to a dying animal/ It knows what it is; and gather me/ Into the artifice of eternity" (Yeats 163).

Thus, from the foregoing discussion, it must be becoming clearer that Yeats's vision of a nation can only be fully understood when one analyses the poem under discussion from the perspective of mysticism, where the mystic poetic-artistic persona is in search of a mystic order/system, in which poetry, philosophy and nationalism amalgamate to form, what Yeats terms 'Byzantium"; the energy expended in the act is a testimony to the same: "I have sailed the seas and come/ To the holy city of Byzantium." This is further proven by Yeats's own statement, "I had three interests: interest in a form of literature, in a form of philosophy, and a belief in nationality. . . Now all three are, I think, one, or rather all three are a discrete expression of a single conviction" (Yeats v).

Yeats's 'Byzantium' is not an ideal world or an alternative refuge, but a place achieved when one realizes the real philosophy and meaning of life and literature, which was accurately articulated by William Blake, who inspired Yeats and was quoted by him in his "Mr. Rhys' Welsh Ballads," that "art is a labour to bring again the golden age" (*Uncollected Prose*92). Although one can find this mystical streak running through most of Yeats' work, in "Sailing to Byzantium," the importance that Yeats accords to mystical experiences reaches its zenith when he writes, "Once out of nature I shall never take/ My bodily form from any natural thing" (Yeats 164).

In fact, even in his poem "The Tower" (1926), Yeats envisages the existential angst of a man caught in an age of desolation : "What shall I do with this absurdity—/ O heart, O troubled heart—this caricature,/ Decrepit age that has been tied to me/ As to a dog's tail?" (Yeats 164). But later in the poem, his poetical imagination and mystic experiences give him strength to declare that “[n]ow shall I make my soul” (Yeats 169). Mystic experiences gave a new fervour and energy to Yeats’s poetical expression of the external world, and at the same time, the much-needed strength to deal with the realization that “[w]hatever is begotten, born, and dies” (Yeats 163). The images that spring from his mystical experiences come together to account for Yeats’s world of complex symbolism (like gyres, rose, lunar phases, tower etc.), thus posing serious challenges for anyone approaching Yeats’s works without some or little knowledge of his exploits into the unknown and esoteric world and its experiences.

Thus, the mystical aspect of Yeats provides us a deeper understanding of his images, symbols, his philosophy and his take on human life and existence. Although it makes his world seem complex, it also justifies Yeats’s visionary and prophetic poetic consciousness, which the latter also demands that added effort from the reader’s side, where she/he has to go the extra mile to decode the ‘other’ world that Yeats’s thinking mind inhabited. Mere theorization of his work will not lead to an exhaustive understanding/explanation of the subtle interplay of artistic imagination and mystical experiences in his work. Thus, it goes beyond reasonable doubt that the introduction of mysticism into our discussions on Yeats would definitely provide a new direction to our attempts to comprehend the enigmatic personality of Yeats as well as offer newer vantage points to understand the artistic range and deep-seated meanings of his poetic and literary works.

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A Journey from Life, the Ephemeral to Art, the Eternal: A Comparative Study of W.B. Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium" and "Byzantium"

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"Sailing to Byzantium" and "Byzantium" are two of Yeats' accomplished poetic works known together as the Byzantium poems. Written in the autumn of 1926, "Sailing to Byzantium" first appeared in *October Blast* (1927) and was part of Yeats's poetry collection, *The Tower,* in 1928. The second poem, "Byzantium," was written in 1930, while the poet was recovering from illness and was published first in *Words for Music Perhaps and Other Poems* (1932), and then in his poetry collection,*The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1933). Viewed together, two poems highlight Yeats's yearning for immortality, as well as the beauty of art over the fleeting and carnal nature of sensuality.

"Sailing to Byzantium" and "Byzantium" are viewed as complementary poems that utilize the rich imagery of the historical city of Byzantium to explore themes of death, aging, and the transcendence of artistic expression. In "Sailing to Byzantium," the poet invokes the holy city, which was once the eastern capital of Christianity. Byzantium is the old name of the city which under Roman rule was known as Constantinople and after Turkey defeated the Ottoman Sultanate was known as Istanbul. It was the headquarters of Eastern Roman Empire. Yeats describes it as a city for the young, replete with sensuality and life and unaware of the grim specter of death. The aging poet sails the seas to arrive at the city, where he envisions himself transformed into a golden bird that will sing to the emperor or the citizens of the city from a golden tree. "Byzantium" opens on the image of the impressive dome of Saint Sophia, a monument to faith that rises above the teeming life below. The poet then explores the image of a wrapped mummy, using the wrapping of the corpse to create a 'perning' action in which the spinning mummy 'unwinds' the intricacy of earthly life. Next, he refers back to the singing bird in "Sailing to Byzantium," as the poet emphasizes the transcendence of art over mortal existence. "Byzantium" ends by describing dolphins—usually considered as traditional porters of the soul—swimming in to the shore bearing "spirit after spirit" (34) to purgation. This paper attempts a comparative study of these two poems and also explores the journey of the poet from life the ephemeral to art the eternal.

Together, "Sailing to Byzantium" and "Byzantium" are viewed as statements on spiritual and artistic rebirth, as well as symbolic representations of the creative poetic process. The motif of the journey is an oft-discussed one in the poems. On one level, "Sailing to Byzantium" depicts the old poet's departure for the ancient city and the later "Byzantium" reflects his thoughts once there. On another level, "Sailing to Byzantium" traces the development of the old poet from an aged, impotent man into a glorious, eloquent bird; this is interpreted to be Yeats's rejection of the bleakness of old age in favour of the beauty and glory of poetry. Moreover, biographers and critics have noted Yeats' strong sense of nostalgia and hatred for the disorder of modern existence; "Sailing to Byzantium" and "Byzantium" embody this theme as the poet perceives the ancient city as a representation of unity of being, splendour, and creative force.

II

"Sailing to Byzantium" was written in the autumn of 1926; the two typescripts (there are seventeen other MS. sheets) are dated 26 Sept. 1926. A. Norman Jeffares in his *A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (1968) writes about the title of the poem:

> Yeats's knowledge of the city was largely derived from reading W. G. Holmes's *The Age of Justinian and Theodora* (1905), Mrs. A. Strong's *Apotheosis and the After Life* (1915), and O. M. Dalton's *Byzantine Art and Archaeology* (1911). He also read Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, The Cambridge Mediaeval History, Encyclopaedia Britannica* and other general reference works. R. Ellmann has suggested that J. B. Bury the historian, who was Latin master for a time at the High School, Dublin, may first have interested Yeats in Byzantium. (251-252)

The symbolic meaning of Byzantium can be discovered in Yeats's *A Vision* (first published in 1925, and then substantially revised by Yeats in 1937); in *A Vision,* it was described at the end of the first Christian millennium. Byzantium is a holy city, as the capital of eastern Christianity, and as the place where God exists because of the life after death Yeats imagines existing there. His description of Byzantium in *A Vision* (1937) shows that he valued the position of the artist in the city:

> I think if I could be given a month of Antiquity and leave to spend it where I chose, I would spend it in Byzantium, a little before Justinian opened St Sophia and closed the Academy of Plato .... I think that in early Byzantium, maybe never before or since in recorded history, religious, aesthetic and practical life were one, that architect and artificers ... spoke to the multitude and the few alike. The painter, the mosaic worker, the worker in gold and silver, the illuminator of sacred books, were almost impersonal, almost perhaps without the consciousness of individual design, absorbed in their subject-matter and that the vision of a whole people. (279)

In November 1924 Yeats had been ill, out of breath, with high blood pressure, and Mrs Yeats brought him to Sicily where he saw the Byzantine mosaics of Monreale and the Capella Palatina at Palermo. This visit may have revived his memories of the mosaics at Ravenna. He had visited the church of S. Apollinare Nuovo in 1907 and seen its frieze of holy virgins and martyrs[1]. On September 5, 1926 Yeats wrote to Olivia Shakespear: 'There have been constant interruptions — the last time I wrote a poem about Byzantium to recover my spirits.' The best comment on the poem, however, is contained in a paragraph Yeats wrote for a broadcast of his poems (B.B.C. Belfast, 8 Sept. 1931) which was not included in the final version of the script:

> Now I am trying to write about the state of my soul, for it is right for an old man to make his soul, and some of my thoughts upon that subject I have put into a poem called 'Sailing to Byzantium'. When Irishmen were illuminating the Book of Kells [in the eighth century] and making the jewelled croziers in the National Museum, Byzantium was the centre of European civilisation and the source of its spiritual philosophy, so I symbolise the search for the spiritual life by a journey to that city. (qtd. in Jeffares, *A Commentary on the Collected Poems* 253-254)

III

"Byzantium" originates from a criticism of T. Sturge Moore. On 16 April 1930 T. Sturge Moore wrote to Yeats that "Sailing to Byzantium" had let him down in the fourth stanza "as such a goldsmith's bird is as much nature as a man's body, especially if it only sings like Homer and Shakespeare of what is past or passing or to come to Lords and Ladies" (Yeats, Moore and Bridge, 162). On 4th October Yeats wrote to Sturge Moore to tell him that "Byzantium" originated from his criticism of "Sailing to Byzantium" which had showed Yeats "that the idea needed exposition" (Yeats, Moore and Bridge

164). This poem was written in September 1930. The prose draft of "Byzantium" contained in Yeats's 1930 *Diary* ran:

> Subject for a poem. Death of a friend . . . . Describe Byzantium as it is in the system towards the end of the first Christian millennium. A walking mummy. Flames at the street corners where the soul is purified, birds of hammered gold singing in the golden trees, in the harbour [dolphins] offering their backs to the wailing dead that they may carry them to Paradise.These subjects have been in my head for some time, especially the last. (*Explorations* 290)

In 'Modern Ireland' *Massachusetts Review* (Winter 1964), Yeats cancelled this passage, formerly in the MS.:

> In my later poems I have called it Byzantium fit' was 'an example of magnificence: and style, whether in literature or life, comes, I think, from excess, from that something over and above utility, which wrings the heart'], that city where the Saints showed their wasted forms upon a background of gold mosaic, and an artificial bird sang upon a tree of gold in the presence of the Emperor ; 'and in one poem I have pictured the ghosts swimming, mounted upon dolphins, through the sensual seas, that they may dance upon its pavements. (qtd. in Jaferras, *A Commentary on the Collected Poems* 353)

IV

"Sailing to Byzantium" begins, "That is no country for old men. The young / In one another's arms, birds in the trees /—Those dying generations—at their song" (1-3). The opening lines are torqued with a familiar conflict of ephemeral versus eternal and mortality of the body versus eternality of the soul. It seems Yeats writes this poem almost from direct experience; there is tension as the aging speaker realizes his own decay and the temporality of his surroundings. Though these 'generations' are 'dying' from the moment of their birth, they do not notice it: "Caught in that sensual music all neglect / Monuments of unageing intellect" (7-8). This first stanza is filled with the sensual, impure life that is distracted, disoriented, and fundamentally doomed. The body floods this stanza with sexual desire, selfishness, and decay. As an old man looks at his world, birds and fish seem to suggest springtime, youth, and procreation; though he finds something whole in his tattered body. It seems only art is eternal. The old man, like Yeats, is an outsider and finds himself alone.

The first stanza of "Byzantium" is similar in that it deals with the impure, sensual world, though it is markedly darker. There is contempt as

> A starlit or a moonlit dome disdains
>
> All that man is,
>
> All mere complexities,
>
> The fury and the mire of human veins (5-8)

T.R. Henn in *The Lonely Tower: Studies in the Poetry of W.B. Yeats* (1965) writes that the dome is the "symbol of Byzantine achievement, the image of heaven, the only canopy for God"; it does not disdain mankind, but rather "the comparative simplification of his complexities" (230).

The second stanza of "Sailing to Byzantium" finds the soul's voice attempting to compensate for an aging body. Attempting to overcome "every tatter in its mortal dress," the soul sings. The only songs they know, however, are songs about themselves and these merely sensuous songs no longer satisfy. They desire to sing about and experience something permanent; therefore, they must travel to a place where that can be sung about in new ways. They must set sail. The decay of age has led to self-discovery and self-realization. Decaying flesh is now an impediment between man and his desired form. There exists a need for permanence that his present body cannot fulfill.

The second stanza of "Byzantium" continues down the dark path it has found: "Before me floats an image, man or shade, / Shade more than man, more image than a shade" (9-10). The stanza continues unsure of what it is discovering. Everything seems interrelated and indefinable. "This most difficult verse concerns the invocation of the dead to discover their wisdom" (Henn 231). This invocation echoes the plea for the sages to "Consume my heart away" (21) in Yeats's earlier poem.

In the third stanza of "Sailing to Byzantium", it becomes clear that a precondition of entering the eternal city is ridding oneself of the body (as it presently exists), the heart and passion; "Consume my heart away; sick with desire / And fastened to a dying animal / It knows not what it is" (21-23). One must become purified of desire, passion, and love. It is the heart's connection with the body, the dying animal, which connects the body to a sickness of desire that disallows true and pure knowledge of self. It seems the body cannot do this alone, however, and he calls upon the spirits of sages who have gone before him. Richard Ellmann in Yeats*: The Man and the Masks* (1979) comments:

> God in the poem stands less in the position of the Christian God than in that of supreme artist, artificer of eternity and the holy fire; he is thus also the poet and the human imagination which is sometime in Yeats's system described as the maker of all things …. The juxtaposition of fire and music in the third stanza may be traced back to his statement in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* that 'In the condition of fire is all music and all rest'. (258)

The third stanza of "Byzantium" opens on one of the Grecian goldsmiths' forms from "Sailing to Byzantium":

> Miracle, bird or golden handiwork,
>
> More miracle than bird or handiwork
>
> …………..
>
> scorn aloud
>
> In glory of changeless metal
>
> Common bird or petal
>
> And all complexities of mire or blood. (17-18, 21-24)

T.R. Henn elaborates on the quality of the bird: "The bird belongs both to the world of the dead, and to that of immortality; it can serve as sentinel to the underworld and to the earth" (233). The bird, in this poem, seems to be the only being in these poems that can successfully pass between the two worlds.

In the final stanza of "Sailing to Byzantium", Yeats continues the bird symbolism which is now a simulacrum of reached perfection:

> Of hammered gold and gold enameling
>
> To keep a drowsy emperor awake;
>
> Or set upon a golden bow to sing
>
> To lords and ladies of Byzantium
>
> Of what is past or passing or to come." (28-32)

The bird represents the man's body as flesh in the first stanza and as gold in the last; the tree represents the ephemeral world in the beginning of the poem and the eternal world as a golden bough in the end. These images have spiraled down and are analogous, not identical, to their predecessors. This relationship shows that Byzantium is not yet paradisiacal; there is corruption in the eternal. Byzantium is dependent on all that is mortal and ephemeral because without these, there would be no need for Byzantium to exist. The old man, once again, is an outsider and seems to find himself unable to reach Byzantium; he must look on from a distance.

At another level, "the golden bird, symbol of the reconciliation of opposites, symbolizes: (1) the poem itself, the created artifact; (2) the protagonist, who fades into it; (3) the poet, who becomes what he creates" (Ellmann 258). It is the complexities that mask multiple meanings and duality of characters. The poem closes as "the poet has sailed to Byzantium but his heart, 'sick with desire', is full of Ireland, and he cannot speak of the natural life without celebrating it" (Ellmann 260). A. Norman Jeffares in his *A New Commentary on the Poems of W. B. Yeats quotes* Yeats's later explanation of his intentions in "Sailing to Byzantium":

> Now I am trying to write about the state of my soul, for it is right for an old man to make his soul, and some of my thoughts upon that subject I have put into a poem called "Sailing to Byzantium". When Irishmen were illuminating the Books of Kells [in the eighth century] and making the jeweled crosiers in the National Museum, Byzantium was the centre of European civilisation and the source of its spiritual philosophy, so I symbolise the search for the spiritual life by a journey to that city. (qtd. in Jeffares 213)

These poems ask to be pulled apart layer by layer, consumed, and pulled apart again.

Finally, in the concluding stanzas of "Byzantium", everything melds in coruscating piles heaped upon the reader's head: "At midnight on the Emperor's pavement flit / Flames that no faggot feeds, nor steel has lit" (25-26). As T.R.Henn suggests: "*Flames* and *Faggot* suggest martyrdom, or the devastation of a countryside by the soldiery: steel has its double sense of the flint or the sword" (234). The complexities arrive from stanza one; "but now they are complexities of fury…there is the Biblical reference to the fiery furnace" (Henn 234). It is the dolphins that will save humanity

> Astraddle on the dolphin's mire and blood,
>
> Spirit after spirit! The smithies break the flood,
>
> The golden smithies of the Emperor!
>
> …………………….
>
> Those images that yet
>
> Fresh images beget,
>
> That dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea. (33-35, 38-40)

At the end of "Byzantium", it seems, in one sense, that Yeats cannot reach his eternal desires and destinations without a mask. That is, he cannot write a perfect poem without distancing himself from the work.

V

"Sailing to Byzantium" and "Byzantium" show a poet's journey from Ireland to Byzantium, but also the journey from life, the ephemeral, to art, the eternal. They follow, in different ways, a general journey from mortality to eternity juxtaposed with the journey from daily life to rarified and purified art. One of the most captivating things about W.B. Yeats' poetry in general and "Sailing to Byzantium" and "Byzantium" in particular is its rich symbolism. Symbols are essentially words which are not merely connotative but also suggestive, evocative and emotive. Symbols conjure before the mind's eye a host of images attached to them.

"Sailing to Byzantium" and "Byzantium" are laudable attempts at bringing together aesthetics, spiritualism, symbolism, and mysticism together on one common platform. The effect is both revealing and enthralling. The poet symbolically leaves the world of limitations to usher into a world of permanence and artistic eternity. Tired of life's agonizing existence, the poet seeks recluse and relief in death and beyond. Yeats writes in his essay "The Symbolism of Poetry", "All sounds, all colours, all forms, either because of their preordained energies or because of long association, evoke indefinable and yet precise emotions" (*Essays and Introduction* 156). Not all symbols that Yeats uses are 'emotional symbols'. He points out, "there are intellectual symbols, symbols that evoke ideas alone, ideas mingled with emotions" (*Essays and Introduction* 157). John Unterecker writes about Yeats' use of symbols:

> Yeats draws his from nature, that same natural world glorified by the romantics. Because Yeats thinks of himself as the "Last of the Romantics," a man born out of his time, he assigns his symbols other values than the romantics did. Made "strange" by those values, his "masked" romantic images jolt us into a recognition of their symbolical function (Unterecker 40).

The deft use of these symbols in "Sailing to Byzantium" and "Byzantium" enhances the reality of the present and mystery and richness of the past.

Richard Ellman writes, "Byzantium is a holy city, because it is the capital of Eastern Christendom, but it is also Yeats' holy city of the imagination as Golgonooza was Blake's" (257). The resplendent transcendental world Yeats visualizes in "Sailing to Byzantium" now gets replaced by the images of a dreary, dark and ghostly place; full of phantoms, 'mire and blood'.

"Byzantium" has three key-symbols in the poem; the Byzantine dome, the golden bird perched on the golden bough and the flames of mosaic on the Empereror's pavement. All three put together stand for the culmination of achievement in art. Being classic works of art they also symbolize immortality and eternity.

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Seeking Vigour in Myth: a reading of Yeats “On a picture of a black Centaur by Edmund Dalc”

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The tendency to relate literature with myth originated chiefly in the Twentieth century. There appeared a number of opinions that argued that literature has basically derived from myth. The way Eliot, while composing his magnum opus *The Waste Land* gave that apparently shapeless and complex poem a proper structure by joining several myths together to show how seriously the Twentieth century believed in an intimate relation between myth and literature. Eliot himself had talked in detail about this mythical method and its great importance in his essay “*Ulysses*, Order and Myth”. An even stronger argument in favor of myths being the forefather of literature was made by Northrop Frye, who pointed out that “ not one genre but all genre of literature derive from myth” (Segal 81).

Actually these Twentieth century writers and critics were taking recourse to myths for solving a very basic problem of their age which was created by the reign of disorder all over. Previously, in the Nineteenth century people like Tennyson attempted to cure the growing conflicts in human soul and society but the Twentieth century demanded a new method. In myths the Twentieth century finally found a proper structure of frame and thus, they attempted to use myths for creating an order which they felt was badly needed. Besides, providing such a relieving order, myths also became for the artists a key using which they could go deep into the storehouse of ancient wisdom for seeking solutions to universal and fundamental problems.

One such fundamental answer is found by using a mythical figure in Yeats’ poem “On a Picture of a Black Centaur by Edmund Dulac”. Yeats was trying to find an answer to a problem which troubled poets of all ages. They often stumbled over an almost unsurpassable impediment which was created due to lack of inspiration. The poets attempted to solve this by seeking inspiration in others’ works. This might be welcomed by a classicist but not a romantic. The romantics would reject this option echoing Sidney’s famous sonnet: “look in thy heart, and write.”(Sidney). They would argue that this kind of imitative stance chokes the imagination, it is a fatal threat to the poetic imagination according to them.

Perhaps Yeats felt that such a sterile and stumbling poetic soul was quite similar to the confused and helpless minds of the Twentieth century. These minds were wondering helplessly in search of inspiration inside the labyrinth of their contemporary culture which was unable to provide the necessary vigour to them. In this situation salvation could come only in the form of mythical figures. These ancient forms are so powerful in nature that they can provide stimulus to the gasping poetic soul of any century. Naturally, myths were used as an activator by Yeats who was one of the last romantics stuck within an unromantic age full of the rusts of an unpoetic culture.

This particular poem can be considered as an ideal example of Yeats’ use of mythical forms to control and sculpt the chaotic unconscious mind of his own. Lillian Feder’s immensely interesting analysis of Yeats’ use of myths shows this interesting aspect of Yeats’ poems in general. She perceives that “no critic has shown that most of Yeats’ efforts to build a mythical system constitutes an attempt to reach his unconscious and control it by uniting his own being to a structure beyond himself “(Feder 61). Feder analyzes a handful number of Yeats’ works including this poem to illustrate her argument. Among all the poems referred by her this one seems the most compact embodiment of Yeats’ use of myth in the way she believes him to be doing.

Yeats begins the poem addressing a centaur: “YOUR hooves have stamped at the black margin of the wood,/Even where horrible green parrots call and swing.”(Yeats). Richard Ellmann’s analysis serves as a substantial and lucid explanation of the situation presented in this poem. Ellmann believes that Yeats “…blames his imagination for leading him to the borders of consciousness beyond which all is dangerous and out of control.”(Ellmann 265).

Ellmann interprets the wood as “the area outside normal or everyday experience”. This is indeed, the mysterious unconscious region of the poet’s soul. The mythical figure of the centaur was used by Yeats elsewhere also. Yeats believed that “all art should be a Centaur finding in the popular lore its back and strong legs” (qtd.in Unterecker189). The last part of Yeats’ comment had led Unterecker to argue that the centaur was to be identified “ with the sort of national culture Yeats had once hoped to found”(Unterecker 190). Ellmann, however, believes that “the centaur is not so much art in general as his muse or imagination”(Ellmann 264). He also comments that this image “connects with a recurrent image of Pegasus… ”(Ellmann 264).

Harold Bloom criticizes both of these observations commenting that “both identifications create as much difficulty as they resolve.”(Bloom 366). In place of the previous two opinions, Bloom offers his own analysis in which he indicates that “ the centaur is another idealized *antithetical* self, which Yeats has loved ‘better than my soul’”(Bloom 367). Though Bloom’s analysis seems very interesting, he commits a slight mistake by drawing an improper conclusion on the premise that “ The centaur is a persona close to madness”(Bloom 367). He believes that Yeats dismisses this centaur and advises it to join the seven sleepers of Ephesus in “ a long Saturnian sleep”(Yeats). He argues that this centaur has “stamped Yeats’ earlier works down into the ‘sultry mud’”(Bloom 367). Despite Bloom’s emphasis, it seems very unlikely that Yeats was critical of the centaur and its energetic stamping. The cenatur was indeed full of madness but that actually was a help rather than a hindrance to the poet.

In order to argue against Bloom, one needs to go back to the account of Cecil Salkeld about the genesis of this poem that shows how moved Yeats was by the figure of the centaur. Salkeld narrates a very interesting experience he had had on an evening which serves as an anecdote about the genesis of this poem. David A. Ross offers a summary of the account of Salkeld : “In July 1920, Yeats visited Glenmalure,County Wicklow, where Maud Gonne and family were temporarily domiciled … On the morning after his arrival Yeats was preoccupied with a partially written poem… That night Salkeld sat up late finishing a ‘water-colourpicture of a weird centaur at the edge of a darkwood: in the foreground, in the shade of the wood,lay the seven Ephesian ‘topers’ in a drunken stupor,while far behind on a sunny distant desert plain elephants and the glory of a great army passed away into the distance.’”(Ross 182-183).Seeing that picture Yeats became highly thoughful and later he also expressed his indebtedness to this picture for composing this poem. According to Salkeld “‘Your picture made the thing clear’, he said. ‘I am going to dedicate the poem to you. I shall call it ‘The Black Centaur’ ”(Ross 183).

Ross interprets this centaur as “ an aesthetic guardian or standard-bearer.”(Ross 183). He welcomes the fact that the centaur has stamped all of Yeats’ works into mud because so far Yeats “… has harvested mere ‘mummy wheat’—esoteric but dead, born not of the sun, but of the ‘mad abstract dark,’under the unhealthy influence of the green parrots.”(Ross 183). Thus, it seems justified to believe that the centaur was actually helping Yeats out of a situation which he was willing to overcome. Yeats had realized that the only the food for thought ripened by the vigour of "wholesome sun"(Yeats) should be consumed and cultured. He needed to get vigour back to his poetry. Unfortunately, his mind was, at that time " being driven insane"(Yeats) because he could only find some "old mummy wheat"(Yeats) which was gathered ,grounded "grain by grain"(Yeats) and finally baked "slowly in an oven"(Yeats) by "some green wing"(Yeats).

In order to interpret these lines in a more detailed manner, it is first necessary to analyze this image of the "green parrots" which obviously is the actual threat faced by Yeats in that world of unconscious region of the mind.Nicholas Grene's observations regarding this image seems highly useful. He comments "These stand in for the sort of representational art that is the ultimate enemy in the Yeatsian aesthetic;they are parrots only because the parrot is identified with the mechanical mimicry of the sounds of others."(Grene 131-132).

In this poem,thus, the journey of Yeats into his unconscious offers him poetic stimulus which enables him to produce poetry that is described using the image of a barrel filled with " full-flavoured wine"(Yeats) and besides, this journey cures his poetic soul from the malady caused by the influence of the ideas that are by nature like imitative parrots. This magical cure is offered by the energetic stamping of the hooves of the mythical centaur. The significance of that stamping becomes clearer if one looks at the meaning of the word 'sultry'. It refers generally to the weather and means hot and humid (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary). It is very interesting that Yeats describes the mud into which his works are stamped using this adjective. Only one kind of mud can be like this, the kind created by volcanic eruptions.

At this point, another valid question may rise, how could Yeats be benefitted so much by a half-beast hybrid creature? Centaurs are, as suggested by Lesley Bolton "brutal and savage."(Bolton 215). Bolton describes them as a race that "enjoyed devouring raw flesh and were constantly on the hunt for it."(Bolton 215) and who "show up in several myths, almost always violent and ready for battle."(Bolton 215). Such an opinion that summarizes the image of the centaurs in general does create a confusion but the answer to this simply is the fact, that Yeats had referred to centaur or centaurs that were exceptional for his/their wisdom and of helpful nature. Moreover, it is the violent aspect of the centaurs that seems to attract Yeats more because from violence it seems he regains his creative vigour, in this poem. This explains the significance of the sultry mud image, that mud, born out of violent volcanic eruptions is the cocoon under which the inferior poetry of Yeats must undergo a metamorphosis before coming out.

Elizabeth Loizeaux 's comment indicates that this centaur was Cheiron. She points out that this poem was based on a painting by Edmund Dulac called 'The Good Chiron Taught His Pupils How to Play upon the Harp',(Loizeaux 139-140). Grene, however counters this commenting that "But the black centaur in Dulac's 'The Good Chiron Taught His Pupils How to Play upon the Harp', which Elizabeth Loizeaux thinks may be the source, is benevolently unlike the frightening beast of Yeats's poem. It is closer in spirit to Dulac's much later drawing of 'The Centaurs and the Lapith Women'"(Grene 131). Loizeaux's opinion seems to convey that the centaur mentioned in the poem indeed acts like a teacher to Yeats, who becomes his pupil. Grene's argument is also useful as the violent aspect of the centaurs seems to very useful here. The prophetic aspect of Chiron must have also inspired Yeats as during the time he was composing this poem he was striving to become a prophetic voice more than ever.

In order to realize the significance of Chiron's myth one must look into the mythical account of Chiron in detail. Jenny March observes that "Cheiron(Chiron) was kindly and humane, and one of the wisest of living beings. He was skilled in archery, medicine, hunting and the arts, especially music, and for this reason many of the great heroes were sent as children to his cave on Mount Pelion to be reared and educated by him."(March 204). He met his end when he "was accidentally shot by one of

Heracles' arrows". As he was immortal he did not die instantly but "his agony was so great that he longed to die."(March 204-205). Along with Chiron, another centaur met his death when Heracles shot his arrows. Pholus is his name and he deserves to be brought under observation in this context because "Pholus possessed a great jar of wine" (March 632) which was desired by Heracles when he visited Pholus. Though neither Yeats nor the two painters whose paintings are related to this poem refer to this centaur directly, the image of the vintage wine used in the poem may owe its origin to this myth of Pholus.

Pholus also died by the same arrow and though unlike the immortal Chiron his demise was instant, it can be easily guessed that both of their deaths were full of excruciating pain as the arrows were "tipped with the HYDRA OF LERNA'S fatal venom"(March 632). Their agony, not their violent nature might have caused them stamping their hooves and because they died, Yeats tells them to go to sleep while he will remain alert hereafter, keeping "Unwearied eyes upon those horrible green birds." (Yeats). Thus, Yeats uses the myths of these centaurs while writing this poem in which creative and prophetic power arises out of the violent vigour and wisdom of these mythical centaurs.

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Time, Space and the Nature of Sin in W.B. Yeats' Purgatory

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And we shall feel the agony of thirst,
The ineffable longing for the life of life
Baffled for ever; and still thought and mind
Will hurry us with them on their homeless march
Over the unallied unopening earth,
Over the unrecognising sea . . .
And then we shall unwillingly return
Back to this meadow of calamity,
This uncongenial place, this human life;
And in our individual human state
Go through the sad probation all again . . .
(Empedocles On Etna, 36-46)

Thus spoke Empedocles in Arnold's poem before he leaped into the crater of Etna, after his failed attempt to 'rationalize' the universe (Watt 13). Yeats' prototypical Old Man too, like Beckett's absurdist characters, is imprisoned by the manacles of such 'mind' and 'thought' which Empedocles once envisioned. Turning back time and recreating their trauma is the only occupation open to them in cycles of each performance. *Purgatory*, a short one act play is entirely dominated by the Old Man's visions of the sinful past, his convictions and action to bring peace of mind to his dead mother ironically culminating in the murder of his son. The boundaries of time and space meet and coalesce seamlessly to suggest the inviolable flux of the universe, which mankind tends to structure as past, present and future, as Yeats writes in *Into The Twilight* (1899):

> And God stands winding his lonely horn;
> And Time and World are ever in flight,
> And love is less kind than the gray twilight,
> And hope is less dear than the dew of the morn.
> (13-16)

Indeed what with man's diminishing belief in God, corruption and moral failings as the after effects of industrialization, modern literature woke up to a terrible dawn of dislocation. The need to break away from the older traditions and forms of art was widely felt across Europe which produced a string of movements- Symbolism, Impressionism, Naturalism, Expressionism, Surrealism etc, all characterized by their deliberate disenchantment with the past. European drama under Ibsen, Maeterlinck, Strindberg, Yeats, Beckett, Ionesco, and Pinter then became a full scale expression of disregard for classical precepts of plot construction and characterization. For modern Irish dramatists like Yeats, Lady Gregory, O' Casey, and Synge, this break with tradition became conjoined with the founding of a national theatre. Thus theatre in Ireland became a place where a rich gamut of ancient Irish mythologies, plight of the countrymen, rebellions and national history found expression in the fluid framework of their experimental forms of drama (*The Shadowy Waters* (1906), *At the Hawk's Well* (1917), *Riders to the Sea* (1904), *Spreading the News* (1904), *The Rising of the Moon* (1907), *Juno and the Paycock*(1924) etc.)

Perhaps it is *Purgatory* (1939) that saw the full genius of Yeats's use of his "tradition and individual talent" (Eliot 13). Though it is a dramatization of the tensions of a modern individual trapped between a past he has himself destroyed (and relentlessly tries to salvage) and an uncompromising present which engenders only remorseless strangers, there is something ancient about its theme (Torchiana 425). The connotations range from the cathartic effects of Greek tragedy to the holy mountain in Dante's *Divine Comedy* (*Purgatory)* where souls are absolved from their sin through remorse, penance and confession. This explains the agony of the souls of Diarmuid and Dervorgilla in *The Dreaming of the Bones*(1919), wedded in mutual remorse, climbing the steep side of that mountain, confessing their sin to the soldier. Hitherto we shall find the flexible time frame of modern theatre merge with Dantesque overtone of timeless purgatorial journey of the soul. Also the play assimilates the 'mugen nô' form or the 'dreaming back' tradition of Japanese Noh drama, as a plausible explanation for the purgatorial dream it embodies (Sung). The effect is almost like a "stream of consciousness" novel, where linearity of time is defied by the circularity of individual thought (James 298).

In this disjointed world an Old man and a Boy appear. The setting itself is timeless, empty stage with a ruined house and a bare tree in the background, like the bare room of Beckett's *Endgame* (Worth 129). The figure of the Old Man and the Boy recur in Yeats's plays particularly in *At the Hawk's Well* (1917) and *On Baile's Strand* (1904), where they are mirror images of each other. Never before has the setting been so grim in Yeats except for *Calvary* (1920), not even in the mystery that surrounded *The Words Upon the Window-Pane* (1934); the well of eternal life, the dreamy cadence of *The Shadowy Waters*are replaced by a ruined house, haunted by memories and apparitions, where a blasted tree alone stands sentinel to two acts of murders (Worth 159). The once magnificent house is also a symbol of the glorious past of Ireland, which now lies in shambles. And the tree, another symbol of the blasted fate of Ireland is also the split image of the "silly old man", a consequence of the corruption that befell the country after the death of Parnell (Yeats 33; Torchiana 424). The burnt house then triggers forth memories and visions of the Old Man who obsessively recounts the history of the house and the image of the house where "great men grew up, married, died" floats up before our eyes (35). Thus we have little physical action, as Yeats like his predecessor Browning was more interested in "action in character" (Browning 408).

'After' and 'before', 'then' and 'now' coalesce as the border of the bare setting is coloured with images invoked from the past: the blasted bark is juxtaposed with "green leaves, ripe leaves, leaves thick as butter, / Fat, greasy life" (34). All sense of time is lost, the entire action is a déja vu of the mother's degradation out of which the Old Man was born and his murderous act fifty years before. Thereafter it becomes an uninterrupted flow of remorse of the "souls in Purgatory [the Old man and his mother] that come back/ To habitations and familiar spots", to "Re-live/ Their transgressions, and that not once/ But many times; . . ." (34). In a moment we have the history of the nation in a symbolical rendering of the Old Man's genealogy- the aristocratic past of Ireland (his grandmother) betrayed by the degenerative spirit of the middle period (as Yeats conceived it, from the Battle of Boyne to the French Revolution- the mother) under the corrupting force of French Revolution (the groom father), that led to 'servile' democracy sixty three years ago the play was written (the Old Man) and the final threat of the Civil War (in the Boy, ignorant and insensitive turning against his own father) (Torchiana 424). It is almost a chain of betrayal, the past betraying the present generation through its wrong decisions and sheer unchangeability, the present generation betraying the future making similar mistakes, and the future generation (the Boy), trying to deny both, and everything collapsing in the process: "For when the consequence is at an end/ The dream must end . . ." (34).

As in *King Oedipus* (the Old Man's obsession with his mother and patricide harks back to the Oedipus myth) the marriage bed of the mother is the source of pollution begetting child that would slay the father (Worth 185). Her lust (relate Laius's doomed desire), rolls the dice for other deaths to come – herself, her husband's, the nation's and its future generation's (the Boy). The undercurrent of fatalism is strong, anticipating Beckett. The Old Man, Donald T. Torchiana points out, is a complex self, who shares Yeats's own love for aristocratic eighteenth century (past), hatred of democracy (present) and mistrust of emerging ignorant generation (future) (424). Born in such a doubly fallen world of Ireland, he is thus justified (however crookedly) to further betray his blood or if we keep in mind the ritualistic pattern of Yeats's later plays that Dennis Donoghue speaks of, this bloodshed becomes analogous of 'bloodletting', a measure to cure the body of infection (343). The body of Ireland (figuratively the house/ mother) is polluted by its inhabitants (second and third generation), they must be routed to prevent further damage. And this day he has returned to the scene of crime, the burnt house where the ghostly couple (his parents) unites to re -enact their lustful act of procreation, to save his mother's soul. The celebration of conjugal lovemaking becomes a parody, an oft repeated punishment designed for his mother in her purgatory, where 'remorse' and 'pleasure' comingle. The old man beholds horrified the spectre of his mother at the lighted window waiting for her bridegroom yet not realizing the futility of his frenzied intervention.

The Boy's voice attempting to rationalize the reveries of the Old Man undercuts them with skepticism. Uneducated and ignorant of past, he cannot help but doubt the grandeur of the desolate house, applaud the materialistic triumph of his grandfather, and call his father mad. His standpoint is thus amoral like Caliban: "what's right and wrong? / My Grand-dad got the girl and the money" while the Old Man is overwhelmed with concern for a country gone to weeds (34). Hence we have a kind of double vision; a simultaneous consciousness of ruined house/grand house, delirium/ vision, blasted tree/ flourishing tree, "empty gap"/ lighted window, present/ past, sin/ redemption projected on stage (36). The Old Man can travel back in time, the son can only behold the past in ruins. In this sense, he is a seer, but to the voice of reason (the Boy), a madman. Still he is no Delphic Oracle, whatever knowledge he has gathered concerns the living, and therefore cannot yield the reason behind sufferings of the dead: "Go fetch Tertullian; he and I/ Will ravel all that problem out/ Whilst these two lie upon the mattress/ Begetting me." (Ure 109; Yeats 37). Located in an earthly Purgatory himself, he can at the most sacrifice a mortal for the deliverance of his mother, but never undo the past or intervene into the spirit world like Christ to redeem souls.

Yeats is hence projecting Ireland and by implication the world as a spiritual wasteland, where man is compelled to sin and suffer in their self created purgatory, "animate [animating] that dead night [of sin]/ Not once but many times!" (Cave; Yeats 39). Individual (Old Man), and ancestral sin (seduction, "coarsening of blood", squandering, destroying property carried out by his parents) has doomed the country, and reduced its inhabitants into mere shades, knowledge into mockery, sacrifice into murder (Torchiana 425). It is a house of guilt that passes on betrayal as heirloom. The mother betrayed not only the older and future generation also herself- her own soul through lust (and somehow one remembers Adam and Eve's lustful union after eating the fruit of knowledge that Milton describes in *Paradise Lost*, Book IX, as the Old Man goes on reciting*Eden Bower* (1868) by D.G. Rossetti). She therefore can only be redeemed through purgatorial penance and mercy of God. Fifty years ago the Old Man had killed his father and run away, another murder cannot help to resolve that crime. His oedipal self shudders to see the father's ghost walking the earth and making love. Frenzied he turns away to his son and finds him stealing money from his purse. His response "Come back! Come back!" is thus not only addressed to the son but a desperate call to dissociate him from that nightmarish vision (37). The son's murder is even more ghastly than the narrative description of the earlier murder. Post betrayal, the son shares the horrible vision of his dead grandfather with his father and is doomed. He is truly a carrier of the genes of his forefather, a prodigal and a drunkard:

> BOY: You never gave me my right share.
> OLD MAN: And had I given it, young as you are,
> You would have spent it upon drink. (37)

The father, son and the ghost grandfather can be seen as a type of perverted trinity extensively used by Dante in *Inferno*. Such is the pattern of their betrayal/sin that the three figures ultimately merge into one; the son killing the father, the father killing the son, a routine of expiation:

> BOY: What if I killed you? You killed my grand-dad,
> Because you were young and he was old.
> Now I am young and you are old. (38)

The hoof beats return on the once gravelled path now covered with grass to spell his defeat. The purification of the family tree in "All cold, sweet, glistening light." is a mere illusion (39). Past catches up, steel can wash away bloodstains but the hand that wielded it shall not go scotfree. Instead of finishing all consequence, the Old Man has widened his cycle of sin, "Twice a murderer and all for nothing." (39).The souls of the living and the dead remain trudging their personal road for redemption. "Mankind can do no more" than turn to God or he is left like Cuchulain in *On the Baile's Strand* (1904) fighting the waves, and be mastered by them (39). The Old Man prays not just for himself and his mother but for all sinners living and dead like Synge's Maurya in *Riders to the Sea* (1904.)

The claustrophobic setting of the Old Man's compulsive thought telescoped before us brings out torments of the soul so convincingly that it comes close to the pathetic narrative of Count Ugolino in *Inferno*, Canto XXXIII. Trials and errors of memory occupy the characters of the three Yeatsian 'ghost plays' *The Dreaming of the Bones* (1919), *The Words upon the Window Pane* (1934) and *Purgatory* (1939) yet there is a crucial difference, while the earlier plays depict the individual minds slighted and haunted by the oppression of memory and their distorted shadow in the present with no hope of release engaging in ritualistic performance, in *Purgatory* (1939) Yeats throws the onus on the Buddhist concept of 'nirvana' or transcendence over worldly desires and sins as the key to salvation (Sung 114). Hae Kae Sung's 1998 essay discusses the possible influence of an old nô play *Motomezuka* on *Purgatory* in this light, where the protagonist, a young woman's ghost is trapped in the fiery hell of her own delusions, unable to attain salvation despite a kind priest's prayers (110). Ironically enough, the influence of Dante also proves strong as the very title of the play suggests. That Yeats' sinner (the Old Man's mother) is bound by her guilt to the burnt down house is reminiscent of the lustful in the seventh terrace of Dante's*Purgatory* where the sinners have to repeatedly pass through fire before their sins are finally absolved and they reach the earthly paradise beyond the wall of flames. The Old Man who has taken up the mantle of *Motomezuka*'s priest in this spiritual wasteland soon discovers that only the sinner's piety and a mortal's prayer can hasten the soul to its redemption as Guido Guinizelli (*Purgatory* , Canto xxvi) had pointed out to Dante on his pilgrimage. However, the ambiguity about the fate of the Old Man remains, who of course is no Dante, but has been going around the burnt house like the trimmers on the vestibule of hell (*Inferno*), engaging in mindless violence against his kin. Also, the re-enactment of lustful act of the mother problematizes the very concept of 'purgatory' where ideally the sinners confess and repent their sins, doing penance to be redeemed, meaning her predicament is bound to end up as Unai of *Motomezuka* unless she stops brooding over her sin and turns to faith. T.S. Eliot comments on the inherent fatalism of the situation: ". . . *Purgatory* is not very pleasant, either. . . I wish he had not given this title, because I cannot accept a purgatory in which there is no hint, or at least no emphasis upon Purgation. . . ." (302.) That is not to say that the mother's future is as bleak as Diarmuid and Dervorgilla or Paolo and Francesca, that would not necessitate ritual bloodletting and the Old Man's desperate attempt to salvage her soul. On an altogether different plane the mother could be seen as the symbol of Ireland as Donald R. Pierce points out submerged in purgatorial penance in the contemporary scene (73.) Hence, the return to faith although seemingly impossible becomes all the more imperative for not just the Old Man but the old poet as well.

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