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*Associate Professor, Department of English,
SD (PG) College Ghaziabad
Email: binduraj20feb@gmail.com*

Abstract:

W. B. Yeats is one of the most famous poets of the first half of the twentieth century. He was born in Dublin, Ireland. In the early part of his literary career, he popularized Irish- folklore, legends, and mythologies through his works- poems, dramas, and essays and established himself as an Irish nationalist. Yeats started writing as a romanticist but slowly grew into a modernist. He was very much influenced by Hindu philosophy and Theosophical philosophy too. He received Nobel Prize in 1923 for his contribution to literature.

Keywords:

Irish-nationalism, folklore, legend, spiritualism, occult, mythologies, mysteries, Hinduism, Pre-Raphaelite, symbolist, romantic, modernist

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Dr. Bindu Karanwal

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Earth, received an honoured guest;
William yeats are laid to rest:
Let the Irish vessel lie
Emptied of its poetry...
Follow, poet, follow right
To the bottom of the night,
With your unconstraining voice,
Still persuade us to rejoice,...

-Auden, W.H. 'In Memory of W. B. Yeats' 1939.

These words speak volumes of the kind of status W. B. Yeats enjoyed among his contemporaries. The lines he wrote in the poem 'The Second Coming', not to talk of his other immortal works, will keep reminding the generations to come of his greatness and his constant presence on the literary horizon.

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,

-'The Second Coming' (lines 1-4)

William Butler Yeats was an outstanding Irish playwright and co-founder of the Irish Literary Theatre, a mystic as well as one of the best-known poets of the 20th century. Yeats was dominating the literary scenario in Europe when writing literature was undergoing tremendous changes. He was born on 13 June 1865 in Dublin in Ireland. He was the eldest son of John Butler Yeats and belonged to a very rich and cultured family. After Yeats's birth his parents moved to London and Yeats was sent to Hammer Smith School, but later he was shifted to the school of Sligo where he stayed with his grandparents which he considered his home till he died, and also expressed his desire to be buried there after his death. Since his childhood, Yeats had been a great lover of folklore and stories related to ghosts and mysteries and mythologies. He used to listen to his grandfather, his mother, and his servants talking about spirits, and from then onwards Yeats's interest in Irish folklore developed, and in his further poetry, we can see the use of Irish folklore and spiritualism a great deal. He met an Indian Brahmin named Mohini Chatterjee and learned about theosophy and Indian philosophy from her. Theosophical Society, which he joined in 1888 and which was presided over by Madame Blavatsky, also had a tremendous influence on him. In that society he learned a great deal about

folklore and spirituality.

In the year 1885 his first poem 'Mosada: A Dramatic Poem' got published in the March edition of the Dublin University review, and he also got acquainted with John O'Leary, a prominent Irish patriot, and exponent of Irish nationalism. Yeats began writing poetry based on Irish mythology, folklore, ballads, and melodies with the support of O'Leary, and that he continued for the rest of his life. Yeats's devotion to all things Irish was enhanced by his relationship with Maud Gonne for more than 30 years, an outspoken and staunch advocate of Irish independence. Yeats wrote nationalistic dramas like the **Countess Kathleen** (1892) and **Cathleen n Houlihan** (1893) with Gonne's support.

Yeats's interest in occultism and spiritualism began in the 1880s, first with theosophy and subsequently with The Golden Dawn, a secret group. Yeats was admitted into the Golden Dawn in 1890 and continued an active participation for 32 years investigating mystical experiences getting engaged in the group's leadership, and it was here that he got introduced to his future wife, Georgiana Hyde-Lees, who had also joined the group. Spiritualist symbolism was used in some of Yeats' poems, notably those in *The Wind Among the Reeds*.

Yeats had developed an interest in theatre by the turn of the century. Yeats, Lady Augusta Gregory, and Edward Martin created plans in 1897 to encourage creative, indigenous Irish theatre. In 1904, Yeats, Lady Gregory, Edward Martyn, and George Moore established the Irish Literary Theatre 'Abbey' in Dublin for the purpose of performing Irish and Celtic plays. The ideals of the Abbey were derived from the avant-garde French theatre. The group's manifesto, which Yeats wrote, declared, "We hope to find in Ireland an uncorrupted & imaginative audience trained to listen by its passion for oratory ... & that freedom to experiment which is not found in the theatres of England, & without which no new movement in art or literature can succeed."-qtd in W. B. Yeats; *Autobiographies*, page 12

They began supporting yearly performances in Dublin in 1899. The popularity of these plays resulted in the development of the Irish National Theatre Society, with Yeats as president and the Abbey Theatre in Dublin as its home. Throughout the first 15 years of the 20th century, Yeats was engaged in the management of the Abbey Theatre Company. In December 1992, Yeats got selected as a member of the Senate of the Irish Free State and moved to Dublin, seeing himself as a representative of order amid Civil War mayhem. He also achieved international acclaim as a writer winning the noble prize for literature in 1923. Yeats produced magnificent poems and plays and also authored a variety of novels,

edited volumes of Irish traditional stories, penned many books of autobiography and translated *The Ten Principal Upanishads* with Shree Purohit Swami of India in the 1930s.

Yeats's Theory of Poetry

Yeats's theory of poetry is of great importance for a full understanding of his poems. In the early stage of his poetic career, he believed in the theory of Art for Life's Sake. However his genius was lyrical, and it penetrates even his dreams which are essentially lyrical. But in the nineties, he became the advocate of Art for Art's Sake. Under the influence of the French Symbolists and the English Aesthetics, he started to write 'pure poetry', a poetry from which all the exterior decorations had been done away with. For example-" An aged man is but a paltry thing, a tattered coat upon a stick." -'Sailing to Byzantium'(lines 9-10)

There were many influences on him as he was first influenced by the paintings of his father. He was also influenced by two prominent literary figures- Edward Dowden, who encouraged Yeats to publish his earliest poems. The first poem that drew public attention towards him was 'The Wanderings of Oisin' (1889). In London, he became the founder members of Rhymer's Club. He believed that literature must be 'flooded with the passions and beliefs of ancient times, otherwise, it is a mere chronicle.' While Yeats's early poetry drew heavily on Irish myth and folklore, his later works were engaged with more contemporary issues, and his style underwent a dramatic transformation. His work can be separated into three parts. The early poems are highly Pre-Raphaelite in tone, self-intentionally decorative, and, sometimes affected, according to unsympathetic critics. Yeats's early long poems such as 'The Isle of Statues' and 'The Wanderings of Oisin and other poems are lyrics on the themes of love or mystical and mysterious subjects. Harold Bloom writes "In his middle poetic career he abandoned his 'the pre-Raphaelite' style of his early work and turned towards writing as a social ironist."

His later poems appeared in consecutive volumes named, **Crossways** (1889); **The Rose** (1893); **The Wind Among the Reeds** (1899); **In the Seven Woods** (1904); **The Green Helmet and Other Poems** (1910); **Responsibilities** (1914); **The Wild Swans at Coole** (1919); **The Tower** (1921); **The Winding Stair and Other Poems**; **Words for Music Perhaps** (1933); **A Full Moon in March** (1935). Many of his early poems, notably Poems written in 1895 and **The Wind Among the Reeds** written in 1899, are typical of his early verse in their surreal atmosphere and their use of Irish folklore and legend. But in the collections *In the Seven Woods* composed in 1903 and **The Green Helmet**, 1910, Yeats slowly cast off the Pre-Raphaelite

style and beats of his early verse and freed it of certain Celtic and mysterious influences. The period from 1909 to 1914 shows a definite change in his poetry. The eerie, related air of the early lyrics changes in this period, and the poems in **Responsibilities: Poems and a Play**, 1914 show a compression and toughening of his verse line, a more light and reverberating imagery, and a new straightforwardness with which Yeats faces reality and its flaws. Some of Yeats's critics termed his middle work supple and well-built in its beats and some modernist, others find these poems sterile and feeble in creative power. Yeats's later works found new imaginative inspiration in the mystical system he began to work out for himself under the influence of spiritualism.

Yeats's mystical thought which was fed and constructed by Hinduism, Theosophical beliefs, and the occult, provided much of the basis of his late poetry (111) which some critics have judged as lacking in intellectual credibility. **A Vision**, his last work, explains the system of his fundamental beliefs forming the thematic concerns of his late work. Yeats famously published his poems in 1922 and was elected a senator of the Irish free state. For his contribution to English Literature, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1923.

Yeats's Philosophy of History

Quite a good number of his poems are based on his concept of history. Yeats's Philosophy of History is based on *Timeframe of Two Thousand Years*. Yeats believed that every Era of the 2000 year is the time fixed for a particular civilization to suffer a downfall. The beginning of any civilization is the golden period of that civilization and to symbolize this rise and fall of this civilization Yeats uses a symbol of *Gyre*. Pointing to the first end of the Gyre Cone, he says that it is when the civilization starts, and usually at the beginning of the civilization, we see the union of the human and the divine. As the cone expands, we see a development of that civilization, and when the cone again comes to an end and combines again, see the fall of that civilization and the rise of the new Era.

‘O sages standing in God’s holy fire
As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
Come from the holy fire, prime in a gyre,
And be the singing masters of my soul.’

-‘Sailing to Byzantium’(lines 17-20)

In the poem ‘*Sailing to Byzantium*,’ this Byzantium is emphasized by the Byzantine period which is of around 1000 A.D. and Yeats considered this period the golden period of this civilization. He also talks that there is an Antithesis to every

civilization in the succeeding civilization. So, we see Pre-Christian civilizations were antithetical to each other and Christ uses the figure of a moon to symbolize the golden period of civilization and he calls this period as 'The Unity of Being'. This concept of Unity of Being forms the poetry of W.B. Yeats. The concluding lines in the poem *The Second Coming* also refer to Yeats's belief that history was cyclic, and that his age represented the end of the cycle that began with the rise of Christianity.

And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

'The Second Coming' (lines 20-21)

A representative of the Symbolist Movement in English Literature

Yeats is considered as one of the most successful and representative symbolists of the twentieth-century English literature who were influenced by the French symbolist movement of the 19th century. This movement in France had started as a reaction against naturalism and the meticulousness and accuracy of the 'naturalist' school represented by Emile Zola.

Symbols generally are of two kinds Traditional and Personal. Traditional symbols are the symbols that have been used by the poets for the set or similar meaning since poetry came into being. For example, 'rose' is traditionally regarded as a symbol of beauty by poets repeatedly. Personal symbols, however, are devised by the poet for his own purposes, to express the vague fleeting impressions passing through his mind, or to convey his own sense of the mystery of life. They express the poet's experiences which are often of a mystical nature. Yeats became the chief representative of the symbolist movement in English Literature.

His poem 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' symbolizes a utopia, a country of the mind where one can live in peace away 'from the fever and fret of the world'

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made;
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

-'Lake Isle of Innisfree' (lines 1-4)

Yeats has used diverse types of symbols in his poetry. They were carefully woven into the fabric of his poems. These symbols, he uses, to convey his feelings, his dreams, and his mystical experiences. In his early poems, his symbols are plain, they are not complex. Some of the symbols which repeatedly occur in his poems are

- the rose, the tower, the gyre, the wheel, the sword, the sea, the bird, the tree, the sun, the moon, the gold, the silver, the earth, the water, the air, and the fire. He draws these symbols from myths, fairy tales, history, and his personal world. They are not the collections of diverse associations, but they also grow, expand and change as living beings and experiences They are an integral part of Yeats's poetry.

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,

- 'The Second Coming' (lines 1-4)

The above lines are from the poem 'The Second Coming' in which Yeats has used Gyre as a symbol. Yeats's symbolism is based upon Blake, Shelley, and Rossetti, the leading poets of English Literature. His other major symbols as in The Rose group of poems, the rose is a traditional symbol of love and beauty. Yeats uses it for absolute beauty, for absolute peace, and evolves a sense of suffering, a nostalgia for something unattainable.

Rose of all Roses, Rose of all the World!
The tall thought-woven sails, that flap unfurled
Above the tide of hours, trouble the air,
And God's bell buoyed to be the water's care

- 'The Rose of Battle' (lines 1-4)

In **The Tower** group of poems the mostly used symbols are towers, lily, moon, sun, etc. The tower is one the richest among the ambiguous symbols of Yeats. It is a symbol of retreat, of intellectual or spiritual asceticism. The tower, for him, stands for mental elevation, upright observation, stability of philosophy, and art. This also suggests the dark future of humanity in some of his poems.

The broken wall, the burning roof, and the tower
and Agamemnon dead.

- 'Leda and Swan' (lines 10-11)

Yeats's mythology, from which occurs the concentrated symbolism of his great period, is not so easy to understand. To those unfamiliar with his thought and the tradition in which he worked, it is difficult to draw him meaningfully. His own repeated view of history compels appearance and merging of metaphors, so that they become reproduced and enhanced; this liberal enhancement may be outlined

throughout his dictum. The images that recur in his writings are Leda and the Swan; Helen and the burning of Troy; the Tower in its many forms; the sun, moon; the burning house; caves, thorn, tree, and well; and eagle, heron, seagull, and hawk; blind man, lame man, and the beggar; unicorn and phoenix; and horse, hound, and boar. These traditional images are continually authenticated by their placement with his own personal experience, and it is this that gives them their unusually vital quality and meaning. These images are his grand achievements. The poetic tones created thus make him the master craftsman of his art and immortalized him forever. All are informed

The Transition from Romanticism to Modernity

Yeats's early poems are romantic in tone and style but gradually changed into a modernist poet. In his early writing he trails the resolutions of romantic verse, using usual rhyme schemes, meters, and poetic structures. The opening lines of 'Sailing to Byzantium' are memorable in this regard:

'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,'

-Sailing to Byzantium (lines 1-4)

Some critics claim that Yeats spent the transition from the 19th century into 20th-century modernism in poetry, while others question whether late Yeats has much in common with the modernist of the Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot variety.

Modernists read the well-known poem 'The Second Coming' as a dirge for the decline of European Civilization, but it also expresses Yeats's apocalyptic mystical theories and shaped by the 1890s. Yeats's imagery became extravagant and more powerful as he grew older. **The Tower**, 1928, **The Winding Stair**, 1933, and **New Poems**, 1938 contained some of the most powerful images in the 20th-century poetry. Yeats clearly avoids using stoic images or referential styles like that of Eliot or other modernist poets for that matter which becomes difficult for a reader to understand.

The Relationship between Art and Politics

Yeats had a strong belief that art and politics were closely linked. He used his writings a tool to express his attitudes toward Irish politics, as well as to educate his readers about Irish cultural history. He fought in the Irish freedom movement as a leader by means of his writings

Yeats was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1923, "for his always

inspired poetry, which is a highly artistic form, gives expression to the spirit of a whole nation". qtd in "The Poet as Politician" by Moses, Michael, Feb 2001. He was aware of the symbolic value of an Irish winner so soon after Ireland gained independence and sought to highlight the fact at each available opportunity. His reply to many of the letters of congratulations sent to him contained the words: "I consider that this honor has come to me less as an individual than as a representative of Irish literature, it is part of Europe's welcome to the Free State," - qtd in "The Poet as Politician" by Moses, Michael, Feb 2001. On his acceptance lecture at the Royal Academy of Sweden, he presented himself as a standard-bearer of Irish nationalism and Irish cultural independence. He remarked,

"The theatres of Dublin were empty buildings hired by the English traveling companies, and we wanted Irish plays and Irish players. When we thought of these plays, we thought of everything that was romantic and poetical because the nationalism we had called up-the nationalism every generation had called up in moments of discouragement-was romantic and poetical."-qtd in "The Poet as Politician" by Moses Michael Feb 2001.

A Vision

Yeats' devotion to the mysticism led to the development of a unique spiritual and philosophical system that emphasized the role of fate and historical determinism, or the belief that events have been preordained

On the afternoon of October 24th, 1917, four days after my marriage, my wife surprised me by attempting automatic writing. What came in disjointed sentences, in almost illegible writing, was so exciting, sometimes so profound, that I persuaded her to give an hour or two days after day to the unknown writer, and after some half-dozen such hours offered to spend what remained of life explaining and piecing together those scattered sentences. 'No,' was the answer, 'we have come to give you metaphors for poetry.'

- 'Introduction to "A Vision" from 'A Packet for Ezra Pound'

A Vision addresses a whole range of human attitudes towards God, though there is little or no sense of the deity existing within or behind the system. Yeats is constantly concerned about humanity's relationships with God, through the detailed

imagery of the wheel and his philosophy over the spans of historical time, including beliefs and skepticism, love and hatred, struggle against and unity with God, human ideas of God are present throughout, as is an emphasis on the supernatural. It was one of W. B. Yeats's fantasies were that **Vision** might found a new Irish heresy, as disciples studied it and applied its doctrines. In fact, even as he wrote this, he knew how few readers his work could realistically expect and he suggested that if his followers may master what is most abstract there and make it the foundation of their visions, a curtain may ring up on a new drama.”

A **Vision** can be divided into three parts: -

1. A critical view of history
2. A view of human psychology
3. A Description of the souls immigration after death

Yeats divided the growth, maturity, and decline of civilization into twenty-eight phases. In the cycle, maturity or the zenith is at the full moon of phase sixteen to twenty either of which is the dark side of the moon. In the section of **A Vision**, men are classified by the amount of subjective and objective qualities they possess. But with regard to man, there are only twenty-six phases rather than twenty-eight, because phases one and fifteen- complete objectivity and complete subjectivity- are never possible.

A Vision was published, subtitled as *An Explanation of Life Founded upon the Writings of Giraldus and upon Certain Doctrines Attributed to Kusta Ben Luka* (to acknowledge sources of the poet's invention). Yeats's idea and philosophy behind it was revealed in **A Packet for Ezra Pound** (Cuala Press, 1929; Wade 163), in the section entitled "Introduction to 'The Great Wheel.'" When W. B. Yeats revised **Vision** printed by Macmillan in 1937—almost making it a new work—he chose to begin the occult book with "A Packet for Ezra Pound", the cluster of essays he had first published as a book of the same name, published by the Cuala Press in 1929.

Yeats links the decadent aestheticism of the nineties and a new realism of the modern age. The two qualities which Yeats valued and which he retained all through old age are passion and joy.

In 1912 Yeats met Tagore and read **Gitanjali** and the translated version of **Gitanjali** had such a deep impact on Yeats's intellect that he used to carry a copy of **Gitanjali** with him everywhere. The romanticism, the mythology, and the vague music of his earlier works are no longer to be found in his later poems. The Nobel Prize for literature given to Yeats in 1923 confirmed him as a great modern poet.

Yeats died on, on 28 January 1939. According to George, "His actual words were 'If I die to bury me up there [at Roquebrune] and then in a year's time when the newspapers have forgotten me, dig me up and plant me in Sligo'. - Foster 2003, page 651.

His instructions were followed and his body was moved to country Sligo His epitaph is taken from the last lines of "Under Ben Bulbin", one of his final poems:

Cast a cold Eye
On Life, on Death.
Horseman, pass by! 94

-Under Ben Bulbin (lines 92-94)

A statue of Yeats was erected in Sligo town in 1989 by artist Rowan Gillespie. It was built outside the Ulster Bank on the 50th anniversary of the poet's death, near the junction of Stephen Street and Markievicz Road. On accepting his Nobel Prize, Yeats noted that the Royal Palace in Stockholm "resembled the Ulster Bank in Sligo." The Sligo Yeats Society is housed at the Yeats Memorial Building, which is located across the river. Henry Moore's Standing Figure: Knife Edge is on exhibit in the W. B. Yeats Memorial in the Garden at St Stephen's Green in Dublin.

I heard the old, old men say,
'Everything alters,
And one by one we drop away...
I heard the old, old men say,
'All that's beautiful drifts away
Like the waters.'

-W. B. Yeats, 'Old Men Admiring Themselves in the Water' Lines 1-10

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