

William Butler Yeats :A TRULY AN IRISH REPRESENTATIVE POET

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ABSTRACT

William Butler Yeats is widely considered to be one of the greatest poets of the 20th century. He belonged to the Protestant, Anglo-Irish minority that had controlled the economic, political, social, and cultural life of Ireland since at least the end of the 17th century. Most members of this minority considered themselves English people who happened to have been born in Ireland, but Yeats was staunch in affirming his Irish nationality. Yeats maintained his cultural roots, featuring Irish legends and heroes in many of his poems and plays. In this paper we cover how Yeats devoted himself to Irish subjects, writing poems through different themes, forms and structure.

KEYWORDS: W.B. Yeats, Irish form poems.

I. INTRODUCTION:

William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) was born in Sandy Mount Avenue in Dublin, the son of John Butler Yeats, who afterwards became a distinguished painter. Much of his childhood was spent in Co. Sligo with his mother's family where he developed a lifelong interest in country people and the rural way of life.

He was educated in London and at the High School in Dublin, later studying art at the Metropolitan School of Art and the Royal Hibernian Academy School. Turning to literature and writing, Yeats came under the influence of the former Fenian John O'Leary and Standish James O'Grady; they directed him to native Irish literature and tradition as suitable sources for literary inspiration[1]. In 1882 together with O'Leary and Douglas Hyde he founded the National Literary Society which aimed

at publicizing the literature, legends and folklore of Ireland. Primarily a poet and playwright, his most successful early work was the collection of poems *The Wanderings of Oisín* (1889). Under the influence of O'Leary and Maud Gonne (to whom he had become emotionally attached), Yeats became involved with republicanism in the course of the 1890s. He took part in a number of the republican campaigns of the time; for instance, in 1897 he joined in the opposition to the celebration of Queen Victoria's jubilee in Ireland, and the following year he helped in organizing the commemoration of the 1798 Rising. Also in the 1890s, he worked with Lady Gregory and Edward Martyn to establish a distinctively Irish national theatre, their efforts culminating in the Irish Literary Theatre (1898)[3]. He wrote a number of plays for the new theatre, most notably *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902) and *On Baile's Strand*, both of which were staged on the opening night of the Abbey Theatre on 27 December 1904. Much of Yeats' work could be interpreted as promoting the ideal of an independent republic free from the taint of Anglicization, *Cathleen ni Houlihan* being his most overtly republican work.

II. YEATS WORK:

Yeats' writings began to be published in newspapers and journals. His first work, an epic poem, *The Wanderings of Oisín*, was published in 1887. It was written in the form of a dialogue between St. Patrick and Oisín, the ancient Irish hero. Yeats was immediately recognised as a significant poet.

A. Major Influences Inspired :

At a young age he was reading Dante Alighieri, William Shakespeare, John Donne and the works of William Blake and Percy Bysshe Shelley, recommended by his father and inspiration for his own creativity[4]. Greatest influences were probably Irish poets Standish James O'Grady and Sir William Ferguson .

B. Writing Style :

As a patriot, he spoke out about the severe Nationalist policies of the time Early works of drama show his love for Irish legends, history, and myths Later plays are more poetic and experimental Wrote poetry about nature and his homeland, Ireland Wrote poetry, plays, short-stories, non-fiction, and fiction[2].

C. Some Writings:

Yeats' works draw heavily on Irish mythology and history. He never fully embraced his Protestant past nor joined the majority of Ireland's Roman Catholics but he devoted much of his life to study in myriad other subjects including theosophy, mysticism, spiritualism, and the Kabbalah. He found his voice to speak out against the harsh Nationalist policies of the time[2]. His early dramatic works convey his respect for Irish legend and fascination with the occult, while his later plays take on a more poetical and experimental aspect: Japanese Noh plays and modernism being major influences. While his works explore the greater themes of life in contrast to art, and finding beauty in the mundane, he also produced many works of an intimate quality[1].

Fiction

- The Celtic Twilight

Non-Fiction

- Four Years

Plays

- The Countess Cathleen
- The Hour Glass
- The Land Of Heart's Desire

Short Stories

- Of Costello the Proud
- Out of the Rose , Rosa Alchemica ,Stories of Red Hanrahan
- Synge And The Ireland Of His Time
- The Curse of the Fires and of the Shadows
- The Heart of the Spring , The Old Men of the Twilight
- Where There is Nothing, There is God

Poetry

- Aedh Wishes For The Clothes Of Heaven
- Against Unworthy Praise , Baile And Aillinn , Broken Dreams
- A Prayer For My Daughter ,Easter, 1916
- He Wishes For The Cloths Of Heaven ,Her Praise
- In the Seven Woods, King And No King,Lapis Lazuli
- Leda And The Swan ,No Second Troy ,O Do Not Love Too Long, Politics , Sailing to Byzantium , Swift's Epitaph
- The Arrow , The Black Tower, The Crucifixion Of The Outcast
- The Dolls , The Everlasting Voices , The Fish The Harp of Aengus, The Host Of The Air ,The Hosting Of The Sidhe
- The Lake Isle Of Innisfree ,The Lover Tells Of The Rose In His Heart
- The Mask , The Moods ,The Old Age Of Queen Maeve ,The Rose Tree
- The Second Coming, The Secret Rose,The Seven Sages,The Shadowy Waters
- The Song of the Happy Shepherd ,The Stolen Child,The Three Beggars
- The Tower , The Two Trees, The Wheel , The Wild Swans At Coole
- The Wisdom Of The King , To A Young Beauty ,To A Young Girl
- To The Rose Upon The Rood Of Time ,Towards Break Of Day
- What Was Lost, When You Are Old

III. THE ABEY THEATRE AND BEYOND :

In 1894 Yeats met friend and patron Lady Augusta Gregory (1852-1932) of Coole Park and thus began their involvement with The Irish Literary Theatre which was founded in 1899 in Dublin. (It would become the Abbey Theatre in 1904). As its chief playwright, one of the first plays to be performed there was Yeats' Cathleen ni Houlihan, with Gonne in the title role[9]. The Abbey Theatre, also known as the National Theatre of Ireland, opened in December of 1904 and became the flagship for leading Irish playwrights and actors. Yeats' On Baile's Strand was one of its first productions. Of his many dramatic and successful works to follow, The Countess Cathleen (1892), The Land of Heart's Desire (1894) and The King's Threshold (1904) are among his best known. When Synge died in 1909 Yeats helped to finish his manuscript for Deirdre of the Sorrows. In 1911 the Abbey Theatre embarked on a tour of the United States[7].

As a successful poet and playwright now, in 1903 Yeats went on his first lecture tour of the United States, and again in 1914, 1920, and 1932. Yeats and his sisters started the Cuala Press in 1904, which would print over seventy titles by such authors as Ezra Pound, Rabindranath Tagore, Elizabeth Bowen, Jack and John Yeats, and Patrick Kavanagh, before it closed in 1946. At the age of forty-six, in 1911, Yeats met Georgie (George) Hyde Lees (1892-1968) and they married on 20 October, 1917. They had two children; Anne (born 1919) and for whom he wrote "A Prayer for My Daughter"[9].

IV. RELATED WORK: POEMS OF YEATS WHICH SHOWS IRISH MYTHOLOGY AND HISTORY :

He was a member of the Irish Senate from 1922 to 1928. In 1923 December he was the first Irish author to be awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. Myth and history form an integral part of Yeats' poetry. He made Irish legends and history a source of inspiration for his earlier poems in particular.

The mythology of Ireland left the Irish imagination for the young Yeats a fascination which Greek and Roman mythologies had for the poets of the Renaissance. Following are themes of his poems[3].

- **Faith : in the beauty and eternity of art.**
- **The relationship between the poet and the Irish people and tradition.**
- **Death : unlike an animal, which simply dies, man dies many times before his death.**
- **The heroic individual : loneliness characterizes his heroes because their superior qualities distinguish them from the common man.**

SR.NO.	POEM	CONTEXT
1.	The Second Coming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written after World War I, at a time of change • Yeats Philosophy of Irish History • Changing of the old Irish Civilization • The birth of New Irish Civilization • His disappointment towards his society And Using of Irish Myths and Phrases (Widening gyre, Ceremony of Innocence, Sprit us Mundi, a shape with lion body and the head of a man etc.)
2.	Sailing To Byzantium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A myth originating from the Old Testament, a group of men built a grand tower but God destroyed it and divided the people. Using this idea

	<p>Yeats could be referencing to the destruction caused by the First World War.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yeats' searching for ideal Ireland • His Philosophy of Irish Culture • Use of different phrases related to art and painting of Ireland (Un ageing Intellect, God's Holy fire, Golden Bough, Paltry thing etc) 	<p>pregnant with Helen of Troy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yeats uses the story to symbolise England's boisterous control over Ireland
3. Easter1916	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A freedom fighter who dedicated her life to ending British government in Ireland. • Maud gonne was a beautiful lady in her young age but now defeated. • Maud gonne's husband: a only drunken vain glorious lout. • Poet's meaningless talking with some persons who died in the movement of 'Easter1916'. • John Mac Bride had done most bitter wrong to some people who were near to his heart. • All changed, changed utterly, a terrible beauty is born. 	<p>5. The Fisherman</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Fisherman is about Yeats scorn for the public and their disrespect of art. • Yeats longs for an ideal Ireland of a time long passed, a perfect Ireland, a perfect audience, and a perfect man which the Fisherman is the embodiment.
4. Leda And The Swan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loosely based on the mythological tale of Leda and the Swan of a woman who is raped by Zeus and later falls 	<p>6. An Irish Airman Foresees His Death</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set in World War I • Yeats wrote this as an elegy to Major Robert Gregory: the son of Lady Gregory (one of Yeats' best friends) who lived in Kiltartan
		<p>7. September 1913</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the troubles witnessed in Ireland, particularly the Dublin Lockout of 1913 where the city was ultimately divided.
		<p>8. Under Ben Bulbin</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He prepared for his own death and accepts that all things including his own life come to end.

Yeats changes his treatment of Irish concerns throughout his life and these changes are reflected in his poetry. Three poems that reflect these changes are 'September 1913', 'Easter 1916' and 'Under Ben Bulbin'. These poems show a transpositions in political thought. In 'September 1913' Yeats shows his aversion to democracy and capitalism, and expresses his belief in an aristocratic society preferably governed by elite Protestants, as they had supremacy over Catholics

in his view . The events of the Rising initiated a metamorphosis in Yeats. 'Easter 1916' shows A freedom fighter who dedicated her life to ending British government in Ireland usually not supportive of violence as a political movement.

V. CONCLUSION:

Yeats poems symbol has a visionary dimension and based it revelation. It has an effective role in shaping both the individual and the collective consciousness. It is not only a device he uses to present his themes. It is a theme in itself, in which truths are embodied, in all their complexity. it can be easily said that the auto-biography of his own is vividly reflected in his poems. He expressed his Nationalism through a passionate desire to revive the Irish literary tradition, and worked towards this end by founding clubs and societies, and by setting up an Irish national theatre. We find almost all cultures and tradition as well as history of Irish people in his poems. He was very much attracted to his own culture and history. Thats why he is considered as the National Poet of Ireland.

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Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research

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The Board of

Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research (ISSN : 2349-5162)

Is hereby awarding this certificate to

Dr. Chandrashekhar Ashok Dawane

In recognition of the publication of the paper entitled

William Butler Yeats :A TRULY AN IRISH REPRESENTATIVE POET

Published In JETIR (www.JETIR.org) ISSN UGC Approved (Journal No: 63975) & 5.87 Impact Factor

Published in Volume 6 Issue 6 , June 2019 | Date of Publication: 2019-06-10

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JETIR1906U05

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Research Paper Weblink <http://www.jetir.org/view?paper=JETIR1906U05>

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