

William Butler Yeats

Irish Nationalism in W . B Yeats' Poetry

Throughout his career Yeats ,the poet of Ireland explored the themes of Irish folklore and myths, themes and settings to create a modern sophisticated poetry. The Irish themes come into his poetry as the remembrance of the glorious past,the myths and legends,the landscape,the heroes,the politics,and the criticism of English occupation.

The personal life of Yeats cannot be separated from his poetry.It is even more true in his treatment of Irish themes in his poetry. He recurrently treated the Irish elements in his poetry for the following reasons.

His personal interest in mythology and the oral traditions of folklore combined with high sense of nationalism inspired him to create a poetry rich in the treatment of Celtic folklore and mythology.So,the subject matter of his poetry,specially the early poetry consists of the traditional Celtic folklore and myth. By incorporating into his work the stories and characters of Celtic origin, Yeats endeavored to encapsulate something of the national character of his beloved Ireland.

Secondly, during the early years of Yeats, there was an ongoing literary revival of interest in Irish legend and folklore. Books with such titles as Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms, and Superstitions of Ireland, The Fireside Stories of Ireland, History of Ireland: Cuculain and his Contemporaries, Irish Folklore, and dozens of others were useful to the young Yeats.This also inspired Yeats to write on the Irish themes.

Another important cause was his childhood experience.Yeats's mother shared with her son her interest in folklore, fairies, and astrology as well as her love of Ireland, particularly the region surrounding Sligo in western Ireland where Yeats spent much of his childhood. Yeats's early

mental makeup moulded his later literary career. Thus, though he spent two thirds of his life outside of his motherland, Yeats's poetic self was deeply rooted in Ireland.

Yeats's fascination for Irish elements mainly came from his meeting with the Irish nationalist Fenian John O'Leary in 1885. John O'Leary was instrumental in arranging for the publication of Yeats's first poems in The Dublin University Review. Under the influence of O'Leary, Yeats took up the cause of Gaelic writers at a time when much native Irish literature was in danger of being lost as the result of England's attempts to anglicize Ireland through a ban on the Gaelic language. This and his connection with another society, the Contemporary Club, brought Yeats into contact with a circle of nationalist intellectuals. He began to read Irish literature, and his subsequent publications bore the marks of that new interest. By the early years of the twentieth century Yeats had risen to international prominence as a proponent of the Gaelic Revival and had published numerous plays and poems.

Now let us discuss some individual poems to see how he treated Irish elements in his poems. The poems that clearly reflect his nationalism are 'The Stolen Child', 'Fergus and the Druid', 'Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea', 'The Hosting of the Sidhe', 'The Wild Swans at Coole', 'Coole Park', 'Coole Park and Ballylee', 'At Galway Races', 'The Ballad of Moll Magee', 'The Ballad of Father Gilligan' etc.

Yeats's first notable interest in Irish materials is seen in his early poem 'The Stolen Child'. The poem is based on Irish legend and Irish setting. The poem, in which a fairy speaks to a human child in a beguiling voice, is set in Sligo, where the Yeatss used to spend their holidays. The voice calls

Where dips the rocky highland

Of Sleuth Wood in the lake

There lies a leafy island

Where flapping herons wake

The drowsy water rats;

There we've hid our faery vats

Full of berries

And of reddest stolen cherries.

The names of the places mentioned in the poem are located in Sligo and the poem reflects the poet's interest in the belief in the supernatural that he found in the west of Ireland, in particular the idea that the faeries carried off children from the human world.

Yeats's treatment of Irish materials, specially the old legends and sagas are also seen in his work *The Rose*. In this collection specially two poems - 'Fergus and the Druid', 'Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea' are full of Irish elements. The former deals with the Ulster's legendary king Fergus, who married Ness. The poem is a conversation between the Druid and Fergus, who was persuaded by his wife Ness to allow Ness's son (by previous marriage) MacNessa to rule the country for a year. But when the king gave the power, he was trickily driven out of the country at the end of the year. Fergus passed his days hunting, fighting, and feasting. Thus, the poem is based on an Irish saga.

The poem 'Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea' deals with the Irish Achilles or the Hercules Cuchulain. The poem is about the death of Cuchulain, the greatest Irish mythological hero, who appears many times throughout Yeats' work.

The legend of Cuchulain goes back to the pre-Christian time. He appears in the Ulster Cycle of stories. Cuchulain, the superhuman warrior figure had a divine from the supernatural father figures such as Conall Cernach. As a youth, Cuchulain defeats one hundred and fifty of King Conchobar's troops on his way to the royal court. Suffice to say that Cuchulain is the hero most identified with Ireland and represents both positive and negative aspects of the Irish people and their struggle.

In the poem, "To Ireland in the Coming Times" Yeats again draws upon Irish folklore and mythic symbols and sets them against a backdrop of national identity. When the poet writes, "When Time began to rant and rage / The measure of her flying feet / Made Ireland's heart begin to beat;" "He is speaking of the affects of the industrial revolution," "When Time began to rant and rage." How the pre-industrial rhythm of life had been interrupted by the hourly wage in the cities, as opposed to the pastoral life of the country that was governed by the changing of the seasons, rather than the movement of the hands of a clock. This accelerated pace of life and of time," "The measure of her flying feet," was reviled by Yeats and he wrote of his distaste of current English life, referring to passions that a man might yet find in Ireland, "love of the Unseen Life and love of country."

In the collection *The Rose*, Yeats emphasizes Irish imagery; the rose, the faeries and the Druid that are all closely associated with Ireland and are used here to disparage the rigid and structured English world view.

Another poem that illustrates how Yeats melds folklore and nationalism is "The Song of Wandering Aengus." In the poem, Yeats refers to Aengus, the Irish god of love. He was said to be a young, handsome god that had four birds flying about his head. These birds symbolized kisses and inspired love in all who heard them sing. The poem deals with the shape-changing of the fairies and tells a story in which a fish is transformed into a beautiful woman whom Aengus spends the rest of his life trying to find. In the poem, Yeats strays from the actual myth of Aengus. Yeats wrote, "Though I am old with wandering/ Through hollow lands and hilly lands." In the actual myth, Aengus was still young when he found his love. "The Song of Wandering Aengus" was about longing and searching, rather than about a song of found love.

Thus, Yeats took inspiration from the myths and legends of ancient Ireland in order to create a conspicuously Irish literature.

Yeats's later poems

Yeats believed the idea that poetry should be changed to adjust the changes around us. So, his nationalism is not only seen in the treatment of the Irish myths and legends. He also wrote about the contemporary issues that concerned his Ireland. His early interest in myths and legends was relaxed by contemporary politics, legal questions, rebellion, and other issues. This change we find in his 'The Green Helmet and Other Poems'. Two poems of the collection clearly reflect his new nationalism. These are 'In Upon a house Shaken by the Land Agitation' and 'At Galway Races'.

In 'Upon a house Shaken by the Land Agitation' Yeats makes an explicit and timely comment upon a political issue. The title of the poem refers to Land Reform, an important movement in 19th century Irish legislation to bring agriculture and the peasantry out of the incredibly impoverished past by changing the relation between landlords and tenants. The 1903 Wyndham Land Act provided for bonuses to landlords who sold property to tenants on easy terms. According to the legislation the tenants were able to buy their farms. Here the house stands for aristocracy, tradition, the Anglo-Irish inheritance, and social stability. Yeats believed in aristocracy. Like Nietzsche he also believed that the rare thing is for the rare people, great things for the great people. This view is reflected in the poem.

Another later poem, "At Galway Races," illustrates how Yeats' work was evolving, but the theme of Ireland was still the most lasting message in his works.

"Sing on: somewhere at some new moon,

We'll learn that sleeping is not death,

Hearing the whole earth change its tune

Its flesh being wild, and it again

Crying aloud as the racecourse is,

And we find hearteners among men

That ride upon horses"

Yeats is not only celebrating horse racing, which is the national sport of Ireland, it is celebrating the endurance of Ireland during its troubles with Great Britain, and celebrating the strong backbone of the Irish, who are men "that ride upon horses." Yeats work literally breathes Ireland in every line, and there is no doubt that Yeats loved this unique land, and wanted to share that love with people the world over."

In another poem namely 'Easter 1916' Yeats also expresses his nationalism. The poem commemorates the Easter Rising of 24 April 1916 when the members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood under the leadership of Patricia Pearse rose against British rule of Ireland. The rising was subdued and the ring leaders were put to death. The poem carefully expresses an ambiguous attitude of qualified support for the rebels. Like the rebels Yeats was also willing to free Ireland from all kinds of English dominance but he hated the violence. He indirectly accused the rebels for overturning the works of years and felt very despondent about the future.

His such poems as 'The Wild Swans at Coole', 'Coole Park', and 'Coole Park and Ballylee' also bear his nationalism. Yeats uses swan as a symbol of tranquility, beauty, and pride—the typical Irish characteristics in his poetry. These poems are also in the descriptions of the Irish landscapes.

His another remarkable poem 'Leda and the Swan' can also be interpreted as literary attack against England's harsh treatment of Ireland. The sonnet composed in 1923 refers to the myth of the rape of Leda by Zeus in the form of a swan. The poem represents the dominance of Swan over Leda. Yeats's uses of such imageries as 'a sudden blow', 'the staggering girl', 'caught in the bill' clearly picture the violence used by Zeus. Here the relation between Leda and Swan is the relation of that of the oppressed and the oppressor, the colonized and the colonizer. As it is clear the colonizer is England and the colonized is Ireland. The former exercised violence against the later. The interpretation seems to be convincing if we consider the time of its composition.

Yeats had a high sense of nationalism. His depth of nationalism becomes more evident if we compare his work with the works of T.S. Eliot. Eliot took Europe and its war-fragmented culture as its Waste Land. So, the English poets became disillusioned with their country after the first world war. But Yeats, who spent two thirds of his life out of Ireland still retained Ireland as his imaginative homeland.

Yeats's sense of nationalism is also seen from the fact that he often made a contrast between peaceful Ireland and industrial England. He also compared the Irish mythology culture with the cultures of classical Greece and Byzantium.

Yeats is considered one of the finest poets in the English language. He was devoted to the cause of Irish nationalism and played a significant part in the Celtic Revival Movement, promoting the literary heritage of Ireland through his use of material from ancient Irish sagas.

The use of Symbol in the poems of W.B. Yeats

After the First World War, the “**Symbolist Movement**” began in France. This movement influenced the English poets profusely. Yeats is one of them. He has been called the ‘**chief representative**’ of the “Symbolist Movement” in English literature. In his poems, he uses a lot of symbols for various purposes in various contexts.

Before going further, we should know what symbolism means. **Symbolism** is the use of one object to represent another in literature. A symbol may be a figure of speech or a literal word that assumes an extra meaning. **For example**, the rose for beauty, the rising sun for birth and the white colour for purity are conventionally accepted public symbols. A symbol may also be a private created by a particular writer.

“**Easter 1916**” is remarkable for the depth and intensity of symbols which have **three characteristic** features: directness of expression illuminated by unexpected symbols, a tone of tragic solemnity and a professional quality. **In the first stanza** of the poem, the ‘**close of day**’

conveys the image of an evening sky. In this poem, the word 'stream' symbolizes change and 'stone' symbolizes immobility and petrification. At the end of poem, the poet utters:

"All changed, changed utterly:

A terrible beauty is born".

"The second coming" is another famous symbolic poem of **Yeats**. In this poem, the 'ceremony of innocence' represent for Yeats for one of the qualities that made life valuable under the dying aristocratic social tradition. The expression 'falcon and the falconer' have a symbolic meaning. A falcon is a hawk and a hawk is the symbol of the active or intellectual mind and 'the falconer' symbolizes the soul of it.

"A prayer for My Daughter" is another symbolic poem of Yeats. In this poem, the word 'tower' suggests Yeats' vision of the dark future of humanity. It is used to suggest loneliness and seclusion tradition or national heritage. Again, 'linnet' symbolizes innocent and cheerful thoughts and 'leaf' symbolizes the soul of a person.

"Sailing to Byzantium" is another symbolic poem by W.B. Yeats. Here in this poem, Yeats has used the elemental symbols of earth, air, fire and water. **To Yeats** Byzantium is a symbol for unity and perfection. Yeats was drawn to Byzantium and its golden age because he felt that they represented a kind of unity and perfection such as the world had never known before or since. In his poem 'Sailing to Byzantium', 'Byzantium' becomes the symbol of a perfect world.

"The Lake Isle of Innisfree" is another important symbolic poem by Yeats. In this poem, Yeats says us his homesickness. The poet has become weary of **London** life and so he desires to return at once to the **Lake Isle** in his own country **Ireland**. He knows that in Ireland he can enjoy a peaceful life. The Lake Isle of Innisfree is the symbol of a peaceful place.

To sum up, we may say that Yeats' use of symbols is complex and rich. Indeed, in Yeats' poetry, symbols give dumb things voices and bodiless things bodies. We may consider Yeats as a great symbolist.

Discuss the elements of Modernism in Yeats' poetry.

William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) stands at the turning point between the Victorian period and Modernism, the conflicting currents of which affected his poetry. Yeats started his literary career as a romantic poet and gradually evolved into a modernist poet. He shifted his focus from Irish folklore to contemporary politics. His connection with the changes in literary culture in the early twentieth century led him to pick up some of the styles and conventions of the modernist poets. The modernists experimented with verse forms, wrote about politics, shifted away from conventions and traditions, and rejected the notion that poetry should simply be lyrical and beautiful. These influences caused his poetry to become darker, edgier, and more concise.

Yeats abandoned the conventional poetic diction of his early work in favour of unadorned language, verbal economy and more direct approach to his themes and subjects. His critical attitude made him one of the moderns. His later poetry and plays are written in a more personal element, and the works written in the last twenty years of his life include his musings on growing old.

Yeats's 'A Coat' is a self-dramatization of a stylistic change, he is casting off the old, rhetorical, ornate style of 'embroideries' for a new, simple, realistic style of 'walking naked'. The coat is romanticism that he is abandoning, and the naked state is the state of modernism he is adopting. It was a liberating poem for Yeats, since it showed him moving resolutely in a single stride from one poetic age to the next. He became more direct, truthful, terse and realistic. This poem showed that he had become increasingly self-critical and disillusioned with others.

Yeats eliminated poetic language, easy rhymes and rhythm and what he put in their place were the qualities evident in 'A Coat' --- conversational speech, irregular rhythms and imperfect rhymes, startlingly frank imagery, and above all honesty and a humility of tone. The poem is a juxtaposition of the poet being adorned with a coat and being naked.

The metaphor of the coat is complicated in that it involves an ambiguity which the reader is bound to struggle with. His 'coat' is a complex, multi-layered metaphor for the kind of poetic style he had previously, 'covered with embroideries/out of old mythologies/from heel to throat;'. The poem is a good example of free verse, a style popularly known to be modern. There is a personal element to the poem as well. Yeats wrote the poem as a response to an argument with George Moore, who accused Yeats of pretending to support Irish culture. The 'fools' in the poem are those who copied Yeats' style and 'wore it' as it was their own creation.

“An Acre of Grass”, written in 1939 when Yeats was 71, is increasingly personal as it describes how Yeats felt about growing old. The author's personal experiences form the center of this poem. Yeats is markedly preoccupied with the flesh and the decay, desolation and dullness that accompanies old age. The poem consists of several modern features such as unconventional metaphors, references such as Michelangelo and William Blake, and simple diction. There is a juxtaposition of ideas, such as 'old man's frenzy', and 'old man's eagle mind'. The tone of the poem is confessional.

Some of the examples of unconventional metaphors are the use of the word 'midnight' to refer to the end of days, end of life and darkness in life. Similarly, by 'an old house', Yeats means his own body which has suffered senility, it can also mean Yeats' life which has now come nearer to its end as the poet has grown old. The 'wall' that is mentioned in third stanza can mean the wall of classicism and tradition which limits the minds of men to following of rules and regulations. In the last line of the poem, the use of the word eagle is metaphorical since it represents clarity, sharpness of vision and goals of life, it is synonymous to the frenzy that the poet refers to. It can also mean that an old man's mind is as sharp as an eagle in the sense that he remembers every moment of his past, memories and regrets. The words 'picture' and 'book' refer to the peace, rest, poise, calm and serenity that was a part of his happy conjugal life with George Hyde-Lees in the Norman Towers. The word 'acre' has several meanings, it can refer to the small plot of green land for fresh breath and exercise, it can also suggest confinement to a small space, metaphorically speaking, the confinement of the mind and body. It can also be taken as a reference to a grave, the final destination for someone who has reached old age like Yeats. The old house may recall the mind which has now become old due to the rest and calm. Timon, Lear and William Blake are the

men who 'can pierce the clouds'. 'Pierce' is the antithesis of the diffuse, ineffectual thought of the 'loose imagination' of old men who do not possess frenzy. 'Mill' is reference to Blake's symbol of the mill which stands for the mechanical, repetitive routine of the industrial machine, but Yeats extends it to 'mill of the mind', that mode of habitual and uncreative thinking which he despised. The allusion of the word 'truth' is the understanding of the true spirit of the mind, it is the ability to do something new and inspiring, gain recognition or critical acclaim. Truth can also mean a position with the great frenzied minds of the past 'forgotten else by mankind'.

Most notably in his poems of 1920's, such as "Sailing to Byzantium", Yeats displays many of the characteristics of modernist disenchantment: skepticism towards the notion of 'truth', a sense of the individual's disorientation within modernity and a pessimism over contemporary life combined with an understanding that the modern world has become spiritually bankrupt and culturally fragmented. Sailing to Byzantium proves to be the poet's long entertained concept of art by which he seeks to cure the malady of the 20th century life. The poem is an evidence of Yeats's excellence of art and symbolic interpretation of modern life. It contains subtle symbolism and a complexity of thought and style. The juxtaposition of concepts like nature vs. artifice, art vs. nature is apparent in the poem. The tension between art and life is a dichotomy in Yeats' poetry. The poem has many symbols, for example, the symbol of the 'gyre' in Yeats' poem shows his philosophical belief that all things could be described in terms of cycles and patterns. Similarly, the mackerels, salmons, fish and fowl symbolize morality and transience of life. The metaphors used for an aging body numerous, such as, 'a tattered coat upon a stick', 'tatter in its mortal dress', 'fastened to a dying animal'.

There is a political and personal reference of Ireland, the poet wishes to go back to a time when Ireland was a peaceful and economical country. "That" in the beginning of the poem is a reference to the Ireland of the contemporary time, or the modern era. The poem traces the speaker's movement from youth to age, and the corresponding geographical move from Ireland, a country just being born as Yeats wrote, to Byzantium. Yeats felt that he no longer belonged in Ireland, as the young or the young in brutality, were caught up in what he calls "sensual music." This is the allure of murder in the name of republicanism, which disgusted Yeats. 'The young/In one another's arms' and 'dying generations' possibly refers to the Irish Rebellion, when people suffered

deaths and losses and had to part with their loved ones, thus saying goodbye through a last embrace.

Byzantium was the center of a successful civilization in the 6th century, it is a reference to the ancient city (previously named Constantinople) built by the Roman Emperor Constantine, it was the headquarters of Eastern Christianity. The city was believed to be a place where God existed. It was a place culturally rich and artistically Utopian in nature. Byzantium is far away, remote, exotic and has an added connotation of a spiritual and artistic center, it is also a metaphor for creativity or a platonic heaven of ideal forms of art.

The main theme of the poem is 'aging', a theme quite personal and common for Yeats' later poems. "An aged man is but a paltry thing,/ A tattered coat upon a stick." He renounces his almost-dead state and imaginatively "sailed the seas and come to the holy city of Byzantium." The speaker thinks that by escaping to Byzantium, he can escape the conflict between burning desire and a wasted body. The modern feature of realism is apparent here when Yeats likens an old man's body to a 'dying animal'.

Through his unceasing desire of escaping to the perfect land of Byzantium, Yeats is indirectly pointing at the imperfect land that he wishes to leave. One of the most common and important themes of Modern poetry, the degeneration and chaos of modern life is evident in this poem. Yeats is saying that the "Monuments of unageing intellect" cannot be produced in modern chaotic times. Line 6 of the poem, 'Whatever is begotten, born and dies' conveying the feelings of loss familiar to the modern poetry. Waste, death, decadence and crumbling of mortal beings is prevalent throughout the poem especially in association with old age.

Yeats invokes the holy "sages" to transform him, to "Consume my heart away; sick with desire/ And fastened to a dying animal" and "gather" him into the "artifice of eternity." Art (artifice) is the only thing that is immortal or eternal; human life is not eternal. It is thus the poet's wish to be granted a body immune to death and to sing forever. Yeats' own note said: "I have read somewhere that in the Emperor's palace at Byzantium was

a tree made of gold and silver, and artificial birds that sang" which would keep the Emperor awake. (2040) A fascination with the artificial as superior to the natural is one of Yeats' most prevalent themes. Yeats says that once he is out of his body he will never appear in the form of a natural thing again. The artificial is seen as perfect and permanent, while the natural objects or human body can decay and become ugly. At the same time Yeats is praising the 'Grecian goldsmiths' and the artisans of that time for creating such perfect and immortal golden birds that inspired him.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the modernism in Yeats' poetry is clear mainly through his use of simple language, metaphors having several interpretations, symbols, political references, allusions and juxtaposition of ideas. His themes, subjectivity and realism reveal his modernist style. Though Yeats straddles the line between Romanticism and Modernism, some of his later poems are considered the best representations of modern poetry.

Yeats as a modern poet

William Butler Yeats was one of the modern poets, who influenced his contemporaries as well as successors. By nature he was a dreamer, a thinker, who fell under the spell of the folk-lore and the superstitions of the Irish peasantry. He felt himself a stranger in the world of technology and rationalism. He is a prominent poet in modern times for his sense of moral wholeness of humanity and history.

Yeats was a realistic poet though his early poetry was not realistic. His later poems, despite realistic accent, are not free from magic and the mysterious world. The First World War and the Irish turmoil gave Yeats a more realistic track. This can clearly be seen in his poem, "Second Coming", when he says;

**The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.**

Obscurity in Yeats' poetry is due to his occultism, mysticism, Irish mythology, use of symbolism and theory of 'Mask'. Yeats was keen to replace traditional Greek and Roman mythological figures with figures from

Irish folk lore which results in obscurity. The juxtaposition of the past and the present, the spiritual and the physical, and many such dissimilar concepts and his condensed rich language make his poetry obscure.

Like Eliot, Yeats' poetry is marked with pessimism. After his disappointment with Maud Gonne and his disenchantment with the Irish National Movement, Yeats started writing bitter and pessimistic poems. But he tried to dispel this feeling by philosophizing in his poems. "To A Shade", "When Helen Lived", and two Byzantium poems along with many more of his poems reflect this mood.

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

Yeats' mysticism is also a modern trait. Although modern age is scientific, yet modern poetry has traces of mysticism in it. Yeats is the only modern poet who initiated occult system and mysticism in his poetry. Mysticism runs throughout his poetry in which the gods and fairies of the Celtic mythology live again. To Yeats, a poet is very close to a mystic and poet's mystical experience give to the poem a spiritual world. The state of spiritual exaltation is described in "Sailing to Byzantium":

-----, unless
Soul clap its hands and sing,

Yeats believed in magic as he was anti-rationalist. By 'Magic' Yeats meant the whole area of occult knowledge. Occult was very much common in modern poetry for numerology was lately been introduced in 19th century. Most of his symbols have a touch of the supernatural about them. Number 14 is his typical occult number which symbolizes decline. In "The Wild Swans at Coole", he says:

**Upon the brimming water among the stones
Are nine-and-fifty swans.**

Being disillusioned by lack of harmony and strength in modern culture, Yeats tried to revive the ancient spells and chant to bring unity and a spirit of integration in modern civilization torn by conflicts and dissensions. Modern man was a disillusioned due to mechanism. All the romances were coming to an end and people were getting brutal. In "Easter 1916" he highlights the disillusionment of modern man. He says:

What is it but nightfall?

Yeats was an anti-war poet and does not admire war fought under any pretext. In his last years, he wrote poems dealing with the crumbling of modern civilization due of war. He believed that a revolutionary change is in the offing. In "The Second Coming" he describes what lies at the root of the malady;

**Things fall apart; the entire cannot hold
The best lack all conviction, while the worst**

Humanism is another modern trait in literature. The threat of war cast a gloomy shadow on the poetic sensibility of the modern poets. The sad realities of life paved the way of humanitarian aspect in modern literature. Yeats' poetry also abounds in humanism. In "Easter 1916", he feels even for his rival. He says:

**He had done most bitter wrong
To some who are near my heart,**

Yeats believed that much chaos has entered in Christianity as it has lost its effect and now it is about to end. The good people sadly lack conviction, while the bad pursue their wicked ends with passionate intensity. The second coming is at hand. This coming prophet will be the prophet of destruction. The falcon, symbolizing intellectual power, has got free of the control of the falconer, representing the heart or soul.

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

Yeats' later poetry is typified by a stark, naked brutality and bluntness. His poems present the truth about the human state and he does not hesitate to use blunt and brutal terms to express it. He called spade a spade. He calls the world "the frog-spawn of a blind man's ditch". He says that a man is:

**All mere complexities,
The fury and the mire of human veins.**

Yeats' use of symbols in poetry is complex and rich. He was the chief representative of the Symbolist Movement. He draws his symbols from Irish folklore and mythology, philosophy, metaphysics, occult, magic, paintings and drawings. Several allusions are compressed into a single symbol. His symbols are all pervasive key symbols. His key-symbols shed light on his previous poems and "illuminates their sense". 'The Rose', 'Swan' and 'Helen' are his key-symbols. Symbols give 'dumb things voices, and bodiless things bodies' in Yeats' poetry.

One of Yeats' concerns was old age which is seen as a symbol of the tyranny of time. Rage against the limitations of age and society upon an old man occurs frequently in his poetry. In "Among School Children" he considers himself a comfortable scarecrow. The heart becomes 'comprehending', unfortunately attached to a 'dying animal'. In "The Tower", Yeats calls the aged body an 'absurdity'. A powerful expression of Yeats' agony facing old age appears at the beginning of "Sailing to Byzantium":

**That is no country for old men. The young
In one another's arms, birds in the tress
Those dying generations – at their song.**

Yeats attitude to old age cannot be typified. Old age is certainly a handicap to the still strong sensual desires. He talks of the limited choices available to an old man who is simply a torn coat upon a stick:

**An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick, ----**

He was both romantic and modern and so talks about balance. In the age of industrialization, man was losing the equilibrium between science and religion. They were destroying their physical beauty by injuring it for the elevation of soul. The balance was lost.

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

Eliot was contemporary and had a great influence on Yeats. Both have certain things in common. Both are intensely aware of man in history and of the soul in eternity. Both at times see history as an image of the soul writ large. Both see an uncongenial world disintegrating and an unknowable future taking shape in the surrounding dark. Both call in eternity to redress

the balance of time.

Yeats is a unique poet as he is a traditional and a modern poet at the same time. Though he started his poetic career as a Romantic and the Raphaelite, he very soon evolved into a genuine modern poet. All the romantic traits found in Yeats early poetry collapsed in his later poetry. Before coming in contact with the Imagist school, he was writing poems, common with the writings of the Imagist Movement. But Yeats symbolism is not derived from that movement. Thus, Yeats is a poet who is both traditional and modern.

Yeats as a romantic poet

William Butler Yeats, especially in his earlier poetry, was one of the most important romantic poets, who exerted a great influence on his contemporaries as well as successors. Though, in his later poetry, the modern tradition which he used was opposite to romanticism, however, there is enough in Yeats' poetry which is unmistakably romantic.

Yeats in his early poetic stage believed in the theory of "art for life's sake". But in the nineties, he became the advocate of "art for art's sake". Influenced by the French Symbolist and the English Aesthetes he started writing "pure poetry", free from all the exterior decorations.

Escape from the realities of life is one of the major romantic qualities. Yeats was a greater escapist than Keats and unlike Keats he does not want to come back into reality. Yeats' early poems made him very popular in the English middle class who wanted to escape from the ugliness and crudity of the industrial civilization. So Yeats was able to carry his readers into a kind of Celtic Twilight. In "Sailing to Byzantium" the poet disgusted with realities of life wishes to escape:

**Once out of nature I shall never take
My bodily form from any natural thing,**

Self-revelation is another romantic trait in Yeats' poetry. Like Romantics, he also wrote deeply personal poetry revealing his spirit, thoughts, feelings and so on. In "Easter 1916", he remarks on various persons who had been close with him in his life. In "The Tower", he is able to sublimate his loss of Maud Gonne. He says:

**Does the imagination dwell the most
Upon a woman won or woman lost?**

Love for mythology is both a modern and a romantic trait. Yeats, like Keats, was

deeply in love with mythology. His early poems are bound in Irish and Greek mythology. Many of his poems frequently refer to Helen of Troy, Leda, Zeus, Aphrodite and Byzantium. There are dolphins, nightingales, mythological beasts, sphinx-like figures and fairy figures. He loves to go into the world of Byzantium. He says:

**And therefore I have sailed the seas and come
To the holy city of Byzantium.**

A sense of melancholy is a common subject in most of the romantic poets. A kind of lamentation on the disappearance of the good things is found in most of the romantic poets. This sense of melancholy is also found in Yeats' poetry. He was in love with Maud Gonne but could not win her. So, all through his life, he suffered from his sense of melancholy. He says in "The Wild Swans at Coole" and feels himself defeated:

**I have looked upon those brilliant creatures,
And now my heart is sore.**

Another Yeats' romantic trait is nostalgia for the old Ireland, Maud Gonne and his past. Yeats feels nostalgic in his poem "Among School Children". He says:

**I dream of a Ledaean body, bent
Above a sinking fire,**

Love for nature is one of the major Romantic traits. It is no exception regarding Yeats. His love for nature can clearly be seen in "The Wild Swans at Coole". He sees calmness even in winter.

**The trees are in their autumn beauty,
The woodland paths are dry,**

Yeats used a rich imagery in his poetry. He was never fully liberated from the 19th century romanticism despite his denial of romantic diction and romantic imagery. In his early poems he uses the vague and beautiful images of flowers, stars, birds, and mythical figures to escape from the ugliness of his age. But in his later poetry he uses horrible the realistic images like the image of the rough beast, as Yeats says, is:

**----- a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
Troubles my sight:**

Yeats stated writing under the influence of Keats. In his early poems, there are many references and parallels to the poetry of Keats. Influenced by Keats, he wishes to escape into an ideal world of Byzantium and to transform into a "golden

bird”:

**To set upon a golden bough to sing
To lords and ladies of Byzantium**

The faculty of Love, too, is regarded as a romantic theme. Yeats wrote a large number of love-poems, but all of them cannot be regarded as romantic. The romantic poets exalt and glorify love. But Yeats’ love is a grand and sublime passion. The early work of Yeats does contain a number of love-poems. His poem “Her Praise” begins with the idea that:

She is foremost of those that I would hear praised

Yeats Imaginative Myth-Making and Mysticism:

Yeats had a deep fascination with mysticism and the occult, and his poetry is infused with a sense of the otherworldly, the spiritual, and the unknown. His interest in the occult began with his study of Theosophy as a young man and expanded and developed through his participation in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, a mystical secret society. Mysticism figures prominently in Yeats’ discussion of the reincarnation of the soul, as well as in his philosophical model of the conical gyres used to explain the journey of the soul, the passage of time, and the guiding hand of fate. Mysticism and the occult occur again and again in Yeats’ poetry, most explicitly in “The Second Coming” but also in poems such as “Sailing to Byzantium” and “Among the School Children”.

Yeats thought himself to be one of the last of the classical Romantics; he celebrated the power of imagination to help people see and empathize deeply. Yeats was greatly influenced by early nineteenth-century artist William Blake, who emphasized the supreme importance of visionary imagination. Harold Bloom notes, **"Yeats knew himself to be the heir of a great tradition in poetry, of the visionaries who have sought to make a more human man, to resolve all the sunderings of consciousness through the agency of the imagination."**

He recognized the dangers of abstract reasoning divorced from imagination and the natural world, and he sought a kind of lost knowledge not taught in schools or churches. Yeats rejected

realistic, imitative art. He believed that only art that recognized and celebrated the pan-psychic power of imagination, myth, and symbol could reveal the deeper truths and intuitive meanings underlying everyday experience.

Yeats' lifelong study of mythology, Theosophy, spiritualism, philosophy, and the occult demonstrate his profound interest in the divine and how it interacts with humanity. Over the course of his life, he created a complex system of spirituality, using the image of interlocking gyres to map out the development and reincarnation of the soul. His interest in mysticism and the occult led him to explore spiritually and philosophically complex subjects.

He hoped that the images he conjured would arouse trance-like states of mystical awareness in the reader and deep insight into the world around them. Yeats, dishevelled wandering star, as he was, continued to develop his poetic style and thought until the time of his death. He labored heroically to combine his idealistic, escapist perspective with an unflinching look at life in the world with all its messy particulars and wrenching agonies, what he dubbed the fury and the mire of human veins."

By nature he was a dreamer, a thinker, who fell under the spell of the folk-lore and the superstitions of the Irish peasantry. Yeats was engaged in numerous esoteric practices: he performed ceremonial magic, studied Hindu philosophy and meditation, and as a young man interviewed rural Irish elders about their experiences in the uncanny realm of faery. Yeats was keen to replace traditional Greek and Roman mythological figures with figures from Irish folklore. The juxtaposition of the past and the present, the spiritual and the physical, and many such dissimilar concepts and his condensed rich language make his poetry obscure. In *Sailing To Byzantium*, he describes the cryptic realm of spirits for which he so fervently searched.

**Before me floats an image, man or shade,
Shade more than man, more image than a shade;
For Hades bobbin bound in mummy-cloth
May unwind the winding path**

The mystical and invisible dimensions of life and consciousness fascinated Yeats. He was not convinced by the teachings of dogmatic Christianity, nor was he satisfied by his father's insistently

skeptical outlook on matters spiritual. Rejecting these two contraries, Yeats pursued his spiritual yearnings in the ancient yet experimental Western esoteric tradition:

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

Being disillusioned by lack of harmony and strength in modern culture, Yeats tried to revive the ancient spells and chant to bring unity and a spirit of integration in modern civilization torn by conflicts and dissensions. Yeats was not content to merely read about or profess belief in a divine reality. He wanted nothing less than gnosis, knowledge and insight of this hyper-real dimension culled from direct, trance-like experiences of super-sensory, subtle realms of consciousness.

This pursuit of unorthodox and bizarre forms of knowledge not only piqued Yeats' curiosity about the nature of life and the depths of the mind, but also provided him with an abundance of potent ideas and images for many of his poems. "Byzantium" evokes a world of phantasmagoric rapture and revelation.

**Dying into a dance,
An agony of trance,
An agony of flame that cannot singe a sleeve.
Astraddle on the dolphin's mire and blood,
Spirit after spirit! The smithies break the flood,**

In a nut-shell, Yeats **“possesses an imaginative mysticism, an essential attribute of Celticism, he has the ability to efface the outlines of material objects in a dreamy mistiness.”**

Apocalyptic Vision in The Second Coming:

William Butler Yeats, the celebrated Irish poet, in his 1919 epoch-making poem, “The Second Coming” shows us a vision of full of apocalyptic, ritualistic and mystical symbolism. Drawing on the image of a falcon that has flown too far and on the notion of a catastrophic flood, the speaker sums up the spirit of his age, which is characterized by anarchy, violence, and the inversion of values. “The Second Coming”, in its entirety, is an astounding encapsulation of Yeats' idea of the gyre and his fears about the future of mankind; it is expertly woven with threads of prophetic literary reference and impressive poetic techniques.

The speaker of this poem is someone capable of seeing beyond the things. He is a poet-prophet of sorts. Yeats uses a bunch of metaphors and to evaluate the present state of affairs.

The first stanza is a powerful description of apocalypse, opening with the indelible image of the falcon circling ever higher, in ever-widening spirals, so far that soon it is out of earshot.

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 falcon representing man and the falconer representing God is symbolizing a man turning away from God and of the chaos that was there at the end of the World War-I.

Over the course of his life, Yeats created a complex system of mystical philosophy, using the image of interlocking conical gyres, to symbolize his philosophical belief that all things could be described in terms of cycles and patterns. With the image of the gyre, Yeats created a shorthand reference in his poetry that stood for his entire philosophy of history and spirituality.

The Second Coming drenches the reader in a storm of language and imagination. It dazzles and penetrates with a force rarely seen in English poetry. "*The falcon cannot hear the falconer*" paints a vivid image of the natural order coming apart. "*Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world*" describes an onslaught of destruction matter-of-factly. Yeats luminous language paints the human world in its arresting beauty and jarring turmoil:

The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

But after the eight lines of the first stanza, the poem suddenly becomes "oracular." Like the Delphic oracle, the speaker speaks cryptically. "Surely the Second Coming is at hand". He has a prophetic vision of the violence that is engulfing all the society as a sign of "*the Second Coming*". It is a revelation, of something which is unveiled. Yeats believed that the world was on the threshold of an apocalyptic revelation:

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

No sooner does he think of "the Second Coming," than he is troubled by "a vast image of the *Spiritus Mundi*, or the collective spirit of mankind.

"When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
Troubles my sight: somewhere in the sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,

The speaker has a weird vision. He sees something approaching in the distance from the sands of the desert and it doesn't look friendly:

"A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds."

The figure of sphinx is a fundamental mystery—"A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun".
Stock observes: "the only thing we [or the speaker] know of it for certain is that it will appear monstrous and terrifying to those whose traditions it supersedes". It does not answer the questions posed by the outgoing domain—therefore the desert birds disturbed by its rising, representing the inhabitants of the existing world, the emblems of the old paradigm, are "indignant."

So, the speaker is left with a strong prophetic vision. Yeats' bleakly apocalyptic vision is simply irresistible. At the end of the poem, he asks a rhetorical question which really amounts to a prophecy. The beast—a harbinger of the new epoch—is on its way to Bethlehem, the birthplace of Christ, to be born into the world. For Yeats, the Second Coming was not a literal return of Christ, but the arrival of savage, atavistic forces: the death and birth pangs of an old epoch making way for the new.

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?

Stock remarks: "Yeats sets his own age in the perspective of eternity and condenses a whole philosophy of history into it so that it has the force of Prophecy".

Though "The Second Coming" is short, it is packed with symbols and visions that are hard to untangle. It has been said that the essence of great poems is their mystery, and that is certainly true of "The Second Coming." It is a mystery, it describes a mystery, it offers distinct and resonant images, but opens itself to infinite layers of interpretation.

W.B. Yeats as a Love Poet

One of the most three common themes of William Butler Yeats' poetry is love; other two being the Irish nationalism and mysticism. He is well-recognized as a love poet in English literature, though his love poems are in many ways differ from love poems of such love poets as Donne and Marvell. The emotional power in many of Yeats' early poems is shaped by the one-sidedness but the poems themselves remain hopeful and bitter-sweet, pure in their language and attitudes about love. Most of Yeats' love poems are dedicated consciously or subconsciously to Maud Gonne, Yeats' unfulfilled one-sided love. Yeats love poems are simple, lyrical, and often dreamy, and they speak knowingly of innocence and beauty, passion and desire, devotion and the fear of rejection.

Prior to analyzing Yeats' love poems we must know about Yeats emotion to Maud Gonne as his whole life as well as his writings are dominated by his feelings toward this woman. In 1889, Yeats met the Irish patriot, revolutionary, and beauty Maud Gonne. She quickly became the object of his unwavering affection and remained so for the rest of his life; virtually every reference to a beloved in Yeats's poetry can be understood as a reference to Maud Gonne. Tragically, Gonne did not return his love and rejected his marriage proposal for five times. Though they remained closely associated as she portrayed the lead role in several of his plays, but they were never romantically involved. At one stage, Maud Gonne got married to MacBride and Yeats' love poetry after that came to have much more poignancy. The sense of loss resulting from this failure is informed by most of his poems written after this such as "No Second Troy", "When You Are Old", "The Tower" etc. Even we find in the poem "A Prayer For My Daughter" which Yeats writes after the birth of his daughter also reflects his uncanny love for Maud Gonne. So,

we can say Maud Gonne is the love of Yeats' life. Though Yeats cannot be united with Maud Gonne but through his poems Maud Gonne and he remain inseparable.

Now, let us analyze some of Yeats' poems individually to trace out how love appears in these poems-

It is totally impossible to understand Yeats' attitude toward love without reading "No Second Troy" and "When You Are Old". These two poems are superb examples of Yeats' love poems where the uncanny love of a lover is expressed toward his beloved though the beloved is indifferent to his love. With the above autobiographical information it is not difficult to understand that the indifferent beloved is no one but Maud Gonne.

In the poem "When You Are Old," an anonymous narrator requests of a former lover to remember her youth and his love for her, creating a surreal sense of mystery that only reveals some shadows of his own past love life. The narrator seems to be full of regret that, with the passage of time, she never took advantage of his love for her, and that he had to watch her age without his unconditional love from afar. The woman, in the present, will see what an opportunity she is missing by ignoring his love for her and leaving him to fade into the past. Yeats chooses not to directly say that he is the narrator to match the mysterious qualities of the third stanza, but in doing so, he has allowed the reader to interpret some secrets of himself. This sad and reminiscent poem is not designed primarily to make an old woman regretful, but to keep a young woman from ignoring the narrator and making the wrong decision. Yeats hopes that the distressing ending to his poem will cause the reader to reconsider her future and not to grow old without him by her side.

Yeats's poem "No Second Troy" is undoubtedly about Maud Gonne. Though the lady is not named in the poem but everyone knew in 1910 that it was Maud Gonne. Unlike many other heroines, Maud Gonne lives a separate life with her distinct personality in Yeats's works. The poem remains masterpiece of controlled rhetoric used to express intense passion in a dramatic and indirect way. Yeats has few equals in English poetry in the way he has immortalized the beauty and charm of Maud Gonne in this poem:

"With beauty like a tightened bow, a kind
That is not natural in an age like this,
Being high and solitary and most stern?"

The poem finishes by saying that the way she turned out was beyond her control; she was born to push the boundaries and challenge authority. Maud is like Helen of Troy, who was the cause of the Trojan War and its destruction. After the marriage of Maud Gonne, the most poignant expression of Yeats' come in the poem "The Tower":

"Does the imagination dwell the most
Upon a woman won or woman lost?"

Comparison with other love poets:

Many other English poets including the modern poets tried their pen in love poems. The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock by Eliot is also a love poem. Eliot's love poem is anti-romantic in the sense that the lover never wholly gives himself to love. But Yeats' love poems are based on the actual passion felt by

the day to day lovers to their beloved. Yeats celebrates the eagerness of the lovers to make love. There are other features in which Yeats differs from Eliot like Eliot is not politically conscious in his love poems. On the other hand Yeats highly conscious about contemporary politics in his love poems. Eliot portrays the decadence of love. Yeats portrays the frustration of unfulfilled love.

To conclude, Maud Gonne once told Yeats that he would must thank her refusing to marry him and the world should be inclined to agree with her, because out of that refusal sprang some of the best love poems in English literature. Thus, we can say that love is one of the main features of Yeats poetry. He wrote love poems in all stages of his career. But most of the time his love poems are based on the frustration of unrequited love rather than on the fulfillment of love.

Themes

The Relationship Between Art and Politics

Yeats believed that art and politics were intrinsically linked and used his writing to express his attitudes toward Irish politics, as well as to educate his readers about Irish cultural history. From an early age, Yeats felt a deep connection to Ireland and his national identity, and he thought that British rule negatively impacted Irish politics and social life. His early compilation of folklore sought to teach a literary history that had been suppressed by British rule, and his early poems were **Odes** to the beauty and mystery of the Irish countryside. This work frequently integrated references to myths and mythic figures, including Oisín and Cúchulainn. As Yeats became more involved in Irish politics—through his relationships with the Irish National Theatre, the Irish Literary Society, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and Maud Gonne—his poems increasingly resembled political manifestos. Yeats wrote numerous poems about Ireland's involvement in World War I ("An Irish Airman Foresees His Death" [1919], "A Meditation

in Time of War" [1921]), Irish nationalists and political activists ("On a Political Prisoner" [1921], "In Memory of Eva Gore Booth and Con Markiewicz" [1933]), and the Easter Rebellion ("Easter 1916" [1916]). Yeats believed that art could serve a political function: poems could both critique and comment on political events, as well as educate and inform a population.

The Impact of Fate and the Divine on History

Yeats's devotion to 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. Yeats had rejected Christianity early in his life, but his lifelong study of mythology, Theosophy, spiritualism, philosophy, and the occult demonstrate his profound interest in the divine and how it interacts with humanity. Over the course of his life, he created a complex system of spirituality, using the image of interlocking gyres (similar to spiral cones) to map out the development and reincarnation of the soul. Yeats believed that history was determined by fate and that fate revealed its plan in moments when the human and divine interact. A **Tone** of historically determined inevitability permeates his poems, particularly in descriptions of situations of human and divine interaction. The divine takes on many forms in Yeats's poetry, sometimes literally ("Leda and the Swan" [1923]), sometimes abstractly ("The Second Coming" [1919]). In other poems, the divine is only gestured to (as in the sense of the divine in the Byzantine mosaics in "Sailing to Byzantium" [1926]). No matter what shape it takes, the divine signals the role of fate in determining the course of history.

The Transition from Romanticism to Modernism

Yeats started his long literary career as a romantic poet and gradually evolved into a modernist poet. When he began publishing poetry in the 1880s, his poems had a lyrical, romantic style, and they focused on love, longing and loss, and Irish myths. His early writing follows the conventions of romantic verse, utilizing familiar rhyme schemes, metric patterns, and poetic structures. Although it is lighter than his later writings, his early poetry is still sophisticated and accomplished. Several factors contributed to his poetic evolution: his interest in mysticism and the occult led him to explore spiritually

and philosophically complex subjects. Yeats's frustrated romantic relationship with Maud Gonne caused the starry-eyed romantic idealism of his early work to become more knowing and cynical. Additionally, his concern with Irish subjects evolved as he became more closely connected to nationalist political causes. As a result, Yeats shifted his focus from myth and folklore to contemporary politics, often linking the two to make potent statements that reflected political agitation and turbulence in Ireland and abroad. Finally, and most significantly, Yeats's connection with the changing face of literary culture in the early twentieth century led him to pick up some of the styles and conventions of the modernist poets. The modernists experimented with verse forms, aggressively engaged with contemporary politics, challenged poetic conventions and the literary tradition at large, and rejected the notion that poetry should simply be lyrical and beautiful. These influences caused his poetry to become darker, edgier, and more concise. Although he never abandoned the verse forms that provided the sounds and rhythms of his earlier poetry, there is still a noticeable shift in style and tone over the course of his career.

Motifs

Irish Nationalism and Politics

Throughout his literary career, Yeats incorporated distinctly Irish themes and issues into his work. He used his writing as a tool to comment on Irish politics and the home rule movement and to educate and inform people about Irish history and culture. Yeats also used the backdrop of the Irish countryside to retell stories and legends from Irish folklore. As he became increasingly involved in nationalist politics, his poems took on a patriotic tone. Yeats addressed Irish politics in a variety of ways: sometimes his statements are explicit political commentary, as in "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death," in which he addresses the hypocrisy of the British use of Irish soldiers in World War I. Such poems as "Easter 1916" and "In Memory of Eva Gore Booth and Con Markiewicz" address individuals and events connected to Irish nationalist politics, while "The Second Coming" and "Leda and the Swan" subtly include the idea of Irish nationalism. In these poems, a sense of cultural crisis and conflict seeps through, even

though the poems are not explicitly about Ireland. By using images of chaos, disorder, and war, Yeats engaged in an understated commentary on the political situations in Ireland and abroad. Yeats's active participation in Irish politics informed his poetry, and he used his work to further comment on the nationalist issues of his day.

Mysticism and the Occult

Yeats had a deep fascination with mysticism and the occult, and his poetry is infused with a sense of the otherworldly, the spiritual, and the unknown. His interest in the occult began with his study of Theosophy as a young man and expanded and developed through his participation in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, a mystical secret society. Mysticism figures prominently in Yeats's discussion of the reincarnation of the soul, as well as in his philosophical model of the conical gyres used to explain the journey of the soul, the passage of time, and the guiding hand of fate. Mysticism and the occult occur again and again in Yeats's poetry, most explicitly in "The Second Coming" but also in poems such as "Sailing to Byzantium" and "The Magi" (1916). The rejection of Christian principles in favor of a more supernatural approach to spirituality creates a unique flavor in Yeats's poetry that impacts his discussion of history, politics, and love.

Irish Myth and Folklore

Yeats's participation in the Irish political system had origins in his interest in Irish myth and folklore. Irish myth and folklore had been suppressed by church doctrine and British control of the school system. Yeats used his poetry as a tool for re-educating the Irish population about their heritage and as a strategy for developing Irish nationalism. He retold entire folktales in **Epic** poems and plays, such as *The Wanderings of Oisín* (1889) and *The Death of Cúchulain* (1939), and used fragments of stories in shorter poems, such as "The Stolen Child" (1886), which retells a parable of fairies luring a child away from his home, and "Cúchulain's Fight with the Sea" (1925), which recounts part of an epic where the Irish folk hero Cúchulain battles his long-lost son by at the edge of the sea. Other poems deal with subjects, images, and themes culled from folklore. In "Who Goes with Fergus?" (1893) Yeats imagines a meeting with the exiled wandering king of Irish

legend, while “The Song of Wandering Aengus” (1899) captures the experiences of the lovelorn god Aengus as he searches for the beautiful maiden seen in his dreams. Most important, Yeats infused his poetry with a rich sense of Irish culture. Even poems that do not deal explicitly with subjects from myth retain powerful tinges of indigenous Irish culture. Yeats often borrowed word selection, verse form, and patterns of **Imagery** directly from traditional Irish myth and folklore.

Symbols

The Gyre

The gyre, a circular or conical shape, appears frequently in Yeats’s poems and was developed as part of the philosophical system outlined in his book *A Vision*. At first, Yeats used the phases of the moon to articulate his belief that history was structured in terms of ages, but he later settled upon the gyre as a more useful model. He chose the image of interlocking gyres—visually represented as two intersecting conical spirals—to symbolize his philosophical belief that all things could be described in terms of cycles and patterns. The soul (or the civilization, the age, and so on) would move from the smallest point of the spiral to the largest before moving along to the other gyre.

Although this is a difficult concept to grasp abstractly, the image makes sense when applied to the waxing and waning of a particular historical age or the evolution of a human life from youth to adulthood to old age. The symbol of the interlocking gyres reveals Yeats’s belief in fate and historical determinism as well as his spiritual attitudes toward the development of the soul, since creatures and events must evolve according to the conical shape. With the image of the gyre, Yeats created a shorthand reference in his poetry that stood for his entire philosophy of history and spirituality.

The Swan

Swans are a common **Symbol** in poetry, often used to depict idealized nature. Yeats employs this convention in “The Wild Swans at Coole” (1919), in which the regal birds represent an unchanging, flawless ideal. In “Leda and the Swan,” Yeats rewrites the Greek myth of Zeus and Leda to comment on fate and historical inevitability: Zeus

disguises himself as a swan to rape the unsuspecting Leda. In this poem, the bird is fearsome and destructive, and it possesses a divine power that violates Leda and initiates the dire consequences of war and devastation depicted in the final lines. Even though Yeats clearly states that the swan is the god Zeus, he also emphasizes the physicality of the swan: the beating wings, the dark webbed feet, the long neck and beak. Through this description of its physical characteristics, the swan becomes a violent divine force. By rendering a well-known poetic symbol as violent and terrifying rather than idealized and beautiful, Yeats manipulates poetic conventions, an act of literary modernism, and adds to the power of the poem.

The Great Beast

Yeats employs the figure of a great beast—a horrific, violent animal—to embody difficult abstract concepts. The great beast as a symbol comes from Christian iconography, in which it represents evil and darkness. In “The Second Coming,” the great beast emerges from the Spiritus Mundi, or soul of the universe, to function as the primary image of destruction in the poem. Yeats describes the onset of apocalyptic events in which the “blood-dimmed tide is loosed” and the “ceremony of innocence is drowned” as the world enters a new age and falls apart as a result of the widening of the historical gyres. The speaker predicts the arrival of the Second Coming, and this prediction summons a “vast image” of a frightening monster pulled from the collective consciousness of the world. Yeats modifies the well-known image of the sphinx to embody the poem’s vision of the climactic coming. By rendering the terrifying prospect of disruption and change into an easily imagined horrifying monster, Yeats makes an abstract fear become tangible and real. The great beast slouches toward Bethlehem to be born, where it will evolve into a second Christ (or anti-Christ) figure for the dark new age. In this way, Yeats uses distinct, concrete imagery to symbolize complex ideas about the state of the modern world.

The Last Romantic : W. B. Yeats

**"Earth, receive an honoured guest:
William Yeats is laid to rest.
Let the Irish vessel lie
Emptied of its poetry."**

W. H. Auden (1907 - 1973)

Like the romantic poets of the 19th Century, Yeats was also inspired by a profound romantic urge. He has also evinced in his poetry all the salient characteristics of romanticism, discerned in the poetical works of Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats and Coleridge. In perfect and close affinity with the Lake School of poets, he upheld the principles of humanism and love of nature.

The romantic movement of the 19th century which brought about a thorough change in the form and content of poetry was responsible for emancipating English Literature from the neo-classical rigidity and strictest norms. Indeed the romantic poets and specially the chief exponents of the romantic movement, namely Wordsworth, Shelley and Coleridge rescued poetry from the neo-classical artificiality. Subsequently W. B. Yeats is found to strike the very same note in the 20th Century English poetry, which despite its wide range and astonishing variety, lacks the mellifluous lyricism of the romantics. It would, of course, be a travesty of truth to hold such view that the 20th century literature is artificial, flat, prosaic and jejune.

But all the same it can be asserted without any fear of refutation that the modern English literature is characterized by a considerable dearth of romantic exuberance, subjectivity and love of nature. Literature of the present century is undoubtedly rich inasmuch as we find in it a mirror of the modern life— its variegated complexity and the modes of complications. But although it is a faithful reflection of life, it falls short of the emotive quality which constitutes the sine qua non of romanticism.

W. B. Yeats in the real vein of the romantics displayed almost all the qualities of romantic poetry.

In respect of the priceless gift of romantic imagination, he can be well compared with the true romantics. His poems are soaked in the qualities which comprise the residue of the essentially romantic values. In the critical parlance, the term 'last romantic' has very loosely been attached to him.

A careful analysis of his poetry would amply justify the term which is apposite and not at all unfounded. His poetry is marked by a plethora abundance of romantic features. First and foremost, his poetry is richly coloured by his great imaginative fecundity. His unbridled imagination may be evidenced by the plenitude of symbols employed in his verses. The symbols have mostly been culled from Irish national history and legends of remote antiquity. These have been used for objectifying and externalizing personal emotions. Yeats put the symbols so derived in curiously interesting texts, for giving vent to his complex thoughts and reflections. Secondly his poetry is marked by a deep-rooted humanism. This humanism enabled him to rise above the narrowness and myopia and to widen the horizon of his mind. As is the wont of the romantic poets Yeats too has a great fascination for beauty. He was a worshiper of beauty for beauty's sake. His craving for the countryside, the idyllic charm of the pastoral landscape may be illustrated by his early poems. The captivating beauty of nature used to attract him and under the spell of its irresistible charm, he used to call others share it:

"Come away o human child

To the waters and the wild".

He was haunted by the sheer beauty of nature. In 'the Rose' group of poems, the rose stands for beauty. Like Shelley, Yeats also had a great longing for beauty which is unattainable. His imagination was also lured away by the beautiful objects and the flora and fauna of nature. Thus his poetry contains exquisite natural vignettes. With the flawless precision of a painter, he limned the enchanting beauty of nature— the lakes and dales and gardens. His excellent poetic imagination loved to dwell upon the marvelous scenic beauty of the pastoral setting of Ireland. It would be pertinent to mention in the context that he exhibited a keen sense (almost like that of the Pre-Raphaelites) of colour. A close textual study would indubitably reveal that he emulated

Keats in depicting nature.. More than any other romantic poet, Keats alone was capable of capturing the wild, sensuous aspect of nature. Yeats too in close resemblance with Keats painted the colourful and sensuous aspect of nature.

Moreover, the romantic poets exhibited a great fancy for the strange phenomena of this universe. The awe, wonder and mystery fascinated the romantic poets and, particularly Coleridge. Yeats too like Coleridge brought the fairies and elfin creatures in the magic world of poetry. Symbols like Hanrahan and Aedh bear eloquent testimony to Yeats's a love for strange and, supernatural aspects of the world. Ireland is a strange place replete with the mysterious aspects of nature. Yeats was also greatly influenced by the strangeness and mystery of his country which have found a vivified expression in his poetry.

A strong spirit of nationalism constitutes another distinctive feature of the Romantic Movement which swept the English soil in the 19th Century. Wordsworth, the chief stalwart of the movement was greatly influenced by the national spirit. Yeats was also a devout patriot and had a great urge for nationalism. He played a pioneering role in the Irish national movement and inspired a host of other celebrities to plunge headlong in the said movement. He loved Ireland with all its strangeness and wonder. He was a veritable son of the soil.

Besides all these, the romantic poetry is pro-eminently lyrical in character. The subjective note is pronounced in the poetical works of almost all the romantic poets. Wordsworth's Lucy poems and the other lyrics of Shelley, Keats and Byron are some of the fine specimens of romantic lyric poetry. Yeats has also expressed his personal emotions through the medium of poetry. His poems are also equally subjective voicing forth the poet's own feelings and sentiments—his love and longing for Maud Gonne, his wistful hankering for the spirit of the past, his concern for the old age, his whining and self-introspection, his likes and dislikes.