



A Critical Study of W.B. Yeats' Selected Poems

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ABSTRACT: This study has been undertaken to evaluate the selected poems of the Nobel laureate W.B. Yeats critically and analytically. This paper embodies the critical analysis of the poems, *The Second Coming*, *Leda and Swan*, *A Coat*, *Sailing To Byzantium*, *Among School Children*. W.B. Yeats stands at the meeting 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 involved in to a modernist poet. He shifted his focus from Irish folklore to contemporary politics. His connection with the changes in literary culture in the early 20th century led him to pick up some of the styles and conventions of the modernist poets. The modernists experiment with verse form wrote about politics shifted away from conventions and traditions and rejected the notion that poetry simply be lyrical and beautiful. 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. Yeats's career is the most famous one in modern poetry. That is a career that has been seen as a representative story about modern poetry as a whole. He begins as a Romantic visionary. Under the pressure of political and social crisis, he becomes a heroic realist. When he grows old, he changes his writing style again. He started to write poems for himself and his families. Sometimes, his poems of this period describe an experience of getting old or a feeling to the flying time. In 1923, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. He was described as an "inspired poetry, which in a highly artistic form gives expression to the spirit of a whole nation" by the Nobel Committee. He is the representative of symbolism in English poetry. In the aspect of creating poetry, he gained great and special achievement. He made great contribution to the development of modern poetry. He won highly appreciation in this field. *When You Are Old* is the masterpiece of Yeats. He wrote it for the lady, Maud Gonne. In the poem, Yeats showed his love with different artistic expressions. Thus, W. B. Yeats is one of the foremost poets of Modern Age in English Literature. He is a man from Ireland. He was fascinated by folklore, ballad, and superstition of Irish peasantry which stand as the major themes of his poetry. His poetic career spans the period of over fifty years. During this period he was constantly becoming mature and his poetry evolved accordingly. Yeats' youthful poems deal with imaginative ideal love and are written in a smooth simple manner. As he progressed in age his poems became more intellectual and complex and profound in themes.

KEYWORDS: Artistic Expression, Ballad, Byzantium, Conventional, Fascinated, Folklore, Modernism, Modernist, Superstition, Symbolism, Unadorned, Victorian

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I. INTRODUCTION

William Butler Yeats is a renowned Anglo-Irish poet, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1923 and a representative symbolist poet, who placed his love for his origins, literature, philosophy and history as a primary focus in his art and in his support of the Irish Revival. The world he presents in his work is a mixture of natural, human and cultural values, a cauldron of Anglo-Irish history expanding its essence towards universal history. W. B. Yeats's concept of history is a subjective one, in which his origins of an Anglo-Irish individual, his family bonds, education and studies, as well as his spirituality are interconnected and come as whirls in his poems. This issue is articulated on the grounds of legends and Irish folklore, in some sort of archetypal presentations, in which sources have blended with his cultural studies, his friendship with great English poets and his duty of changing the poetic expression of the time into something very modern, and at the same time rooted in Ireland's mythological past, something personal, and yet national, which was not just a copy of the European poetic patterns. His entire poetical reaction is delivered to the reader as an organized whole that combines Yeats's three great passions: the one for literature, the one for history and the one for philosophy. Other important elements in this framework are his interest in occultism, hermetic studies, theosophy, cabalistic teachings, Rosicrucian philosophy,

alchemy, astrology, magic, spirituality, as well as his frustrated love for Maud Gonne. These elements from which Yeats has drawn his subject matter were kept and improved throughout his entire poetic

creation, although he continuously perfected his poetic expression. From his first collection of poetry, *The Wanderings of Oisín* to *Last Poems*, one cannot help but notice the continuous evolution of his style and his poetic techniques, and the increasing intensity and vigour of his verse. No other Irish poet of the twentieth century was so much engaged in keeping his work separate from the Irish political background, and yet no other poet managed to influence so much the social, cultural and historical realities of his time. Through his writing, he attempted to educate his people, to help Ireland achieve a sense of unity by directing the Irishmen towards their country's mythical history, towards the values on which Ireland itself was founded. The Anglo-Irish poet was defined by a three-stage career, the first one being characterised by a pre-Raphaelite tone, self-consciously ornate, which at times could also be considered stilted by the harsh critics of his generation. He began by dedicating his poems to love, esoteric practices, myths, history and mystical subjects. As time went by, Yeats continued to reinvent himself and his poetry until his verse finally began to acquire that quality of being able to shape the identity of an entire nation. Thus, a new stage of his development began and a new and improved artist was born. As regards the poetry written in the second phase of creation, critics have formed two sides, which viewed the poet's work in very different manners: on the one hand, his poetry was considered rhythmic and muscular, with very modernist presentation, while on the other there was no power in the works and they seemed barren. Moving away from this period, Yeats came back to his interest in the mystical system and spiritualism analysing the worldly man and the spectral one in contrast, drawing upon their opposition. This return to spiritualism can be regarded as a cyclical enclosure of his career. By doing so, the poet manages to create a parallel between himself as an artist and his vision of historical cycles. Yeats found inspiration for the erotic poetry that deals with the frustration, the non-identification and the obsession of the fragmentary in Jung's demonism and archetypes. The Irish poet created his work relying on occult and astrological embodiment of the artistic human spirit, that of a genius – a daemon (the complex creative genius, which brings visions to the artistic universe called by the Renaissance artists *Summa*) which completely dominates the poetical work. Yeats intertwines time and space, having a combination of time and topos, resulting in portrayals of Byzantium, Egypt, or Thoor Ballylee. This haunting daemon is the all-encompassing inspiration, the artistic creator, having a bit of a devil in himself, a demonic creative drive drawn from the Romantic tradition, which included the extremes and identified with all humanly spiritual forces related to the positive and the negative and leading to the vegetal and even the animal life. A poet of contrasting visions, Yeats places the human in the centre of existence, portraying a Druidic type of divinity, intersecting the human at his free will and creating great cycles of human history. As Faulkner once said, "the past is not the past, it has not even passed. It is with us always because we are not what we are." We cannot detach

ourselves from the past. And as the past can be regarded as an equivalent to history, in order to give a proper interpretation to Yeats's life and work, we cannot do it without situating the corpus of his creation into the context of Irish history, without trying to understand why his country's historical context played such an important part in his creation. When discussing William Butler Yeats's poetry, Ricoeur's performable and equilibrated endeavour that materialized itself from the blending between Cartesian transcendentalism and Nietzsche's influence, is the one that brings life to the core of Yeats's poetical discourse – a mixture of ancient myths, German expressionism and Nietzsche's philosophy. In the light of Ricoeur's study, *History, Memory, Forgetting*, the idea of history articulated in Yeats's poetic discourse becomes more approachable. The concept of double in literature appears to be more dominant with the Romantics who also developed a preference for introspections and self-awareness. The doubling falls into two categories: the classical forms in the poetic consciousness (that is the doubling between the poet's being and its self) and the Romantic doubling (between its daemons as forces of creation). The *Doppelgänger* effect (found in Shelley's or Blake's poetry, but also in prose, where the double is expressed through characters) is actually the artist's way of projecting his ego onto the work. Yeats's inclination towards psychoanalysis helps to refine his literature of doubling; speaking from a biographical point of view, the author presents a profoundly doubled personality mainly due to his Anglo-Irish linguistic and historical heritage. With the process of creativity, the doubling may be said to perceive the universe (nature, society, divinity) as a I-you/I-the other connection of otherness in a double sense: it both projects itself and include otherness. In the process of creation the poet perceives reality as a voyage of initiation in which he defines the self, the ego, the superego, the individual and poetic consciousness in the process of its becoming and that of writing itself. The self is a combination of the conscious and the unconscious, according to Carl Gustav Jung, or of the conscious and the psychosomatic component, in the Freudian approach. In point of artistic creation, the ego separates from the self only to return with a new and complete identity. The poetic self is thus doubled in the work of art whereas the poetic egos start off as voices of the discourse and end up in a narcissistic manner as an aesthetically matured super ego. The level of doubling is reflected in the microstructure of the literary text as a link between the subject and the object, and the poet and poetic word. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the act of creation becomes a complex process by which words are shaped and given a new form, based on a classical cosmological system. In its mature period, Yeats's poetry begins to show a non-centred self and a confused hero in a mythical space

and time, based both on fantastic and real coordinates created with an inner dimension and projected outside. The first chapter entitled *Yeats's Biography as an Anglo-Irish Artist* reveals in its five subchapters a detailed biography of the artist by emphasising all the steps he had to undergo in his development as a poet. The *Artist Grows of Historical Extremes* tackles the formation of the author torn between two worlds, two countries, two identities that he continuously tries to combine in order to achieve the much desired unity of being. The second subchapter, *The Sign of a Father – an English Artist*, is dedicated to his relationship with his father, John Butler Yeats, whom he deeply appreciated, and to whom he owes much of his development as an artist, but who overwhelmed him with his desire to move back and forth between England and Ireland, and with his tendency to have a strong point of view on every matter and to impose it on everybody around him. Nevertheless, it was John Butler's lack of belief in something higher than science that pushed Yeats towards exotic religions, occultism and esoteric practices – fascinating domains that helped Yeats create his own vision of world and history, thoroughly described in *A Vision*, a study extended to philosophical, historical, astrological, and poetic topics, that Yeats assembled due to his wife's automatic writing. The following subchapter portrays the bond that the poet had with his mother, whose songs and stories with fishermen, and whose profound love for Ireland, and especially for Sligo, her birthplace, where he and his brothers spent time as children, awakened the young child's interest in the local geography and folk tales, two central inspirational elements in the poet's subsequent creation. One overwhelming element in the poet's artistic development is represented by the Irish Revival and Yeats's connection to Lady Augusta Gregory and Edward Martyn, with whom he founded the Irish Literary Theatre and the Abbey Theatre. Nevertheless, Lady Augusta was more than a business associate for him. She was the one who took care of him when he was in poor health, the one who brought him on the right path whenever his experiences with Maud left him completely disoriented and also the one who encouraged him to draw his subject matter from Irish folklore. Under her guidance, he began writing plays and he included folk-tales and folk-legends in his shaping of the unique cultural identity that Ireland needed. The most haunting experience of Yeats's life can be considered his first meeting with Maud Gonne, the woman he was in love with for almost three decades. His constant obsession with her personality, and his admiration of her beauty and courage drove him to propose to her time and again, as if he could never get tired of her refusals. The more she drove him away, the more he kept coming back for more, as if every rejection only managed to reinforce his feeling for her. His unrequited love for her was the subject of many of his poems, in each and every one of them stating his devotion and admiration for her character and beauty. Even though time came when he felt frustrated by her actions, the charm he felt for her never faded away. Her refusal to marry him became a cyclic event in his existence, but he kept on feeding himself from frustration and grief to give birth to an incredible poetic imagery. The impressive Irish movement, whose purpose was to create a national art, is the focus of our next chapter, *Yeats within the Irish Revival*. The first subchapter, *Yeats's Return to Tradition* exemplifies the ways in which the young poet was guided and influenced by Lady Gregory, who urged him to write about folklore and national myths. As we continue our research, we present Yeats in the position of a dramatist, focusing mainly on his years at the Irish Literary Theatre, when he realized the importance of formulating an Irish dramatic tradition. The final subchapter, *In the Whirl of Local History Events*, underlines the fact that Yeats, even though young when the Irish struggle was at its highest points, felt the need to integrate himself in the fight in a more active manner, joined several literary organizations that supported the cause and befriended Fenian members. This experience made the poet conceive a carefully wrought concept of world history in its important moments and it stirred up his appreciation for Irish nationalism. The following chapter, *Yeats's History as a Concept*, extends to the relation between the concepts we find in Ricoeur's *History, Memory, Forgetting* and Yeats's own concepts. While studying the phenomenology of memory, we realize that between Paul Ricoeur's treatise and W. B. Yeats's *Autobiographies* connections can be found. The theoretician lays the foundation for his theories on Socrates' philosophy, which in turn influenced both Plato and Aristotle. Ricoeur expands on the idea that remembering something means remembering the self, mentioning the importance of individual and collective memory. The author draws the conclusion that the field of history is characterized through the polarity between the individual and collective memory but also through a treble/triple attribution of history: that of the self, of close people and the others. The second part of his study deals with history as the limit between lived past and present and highlights the opposition between the memory of the group and collective memory, suggesting that history belongs to

everyone and at the same time to nobody, which makes it universal. The second subchapter of our thesis links the poet to the national events which inspired his work. At the same time it points out that his poems were a type of propaganda for the Irish literature, not for the Irish politics. We also take into account his rise as a politician and his becoming a senator, when he militated for the minority he represented. His utmost desire was to understand the place of the Anglo-Irish in a community torn apart by the lack of unity.

As we move forward with our research, our intention is that of exploring Yeats's desire for the liberty to write Irish poetry in English and for the freedom one should feel in trying to define himself/herself as belonging to a community of multiple origins. He believed that a poem's Irish-ness does not lie in the language it was written in, but in the feelings it sends forth, which are able to trespass any barrier imposed by language. The present

subchapter also examines Yeats's three stages of creation with an emphasis on the characteristics of his poetry in each of these stages: the romantic qualities of his first poems, the mixture of love, nationalism and symbolism in his subsequent poems, and the symbolism and modernity of his final poems. The final subchapter, *Yeats vs. Imagism and the Haiku; Yeats and T.S. Eliot*, exemplifies the complexity of the author's poetry by contrasting its vivid language, elaborate structure and its musicality with haiku and its characteristics, shows the relationship between haiku and Imagism and highlights Ezra Pound's influence on Yeats's style. The second part of the subchapter presents a parallel between the modern visions of Yeats and Eliot analysing the common, but mostly the antithetical elements of their literary legacy, one of them keeping in mind the idea that he wants to write as men have always written, while the other was trying to revolutionize poetic expression. The fourth chapter, *Yeats's Historical Cycles in Poetic Representation*, consists of five subchapters, each covering various poems regarded as pinpointing elements that help sustain our research. *The Way to "The Tower" or Art is higher than life* exposes the poet's inspirational drive, together with society's decline, examines the steps he took in his development as a poet, and presents some sort of return to the Irish mythological past bearing in mind that art is higher than life. In the next subchapter, *The Tower – A Spiritual Travel into the European Past; Present Artistic Values and Higher Poetic Creation*, we analyze some of the most important poems included in the collection that marks Yeats's involuntary embracing of modernism. A special focus is laid on "Sailing to Byzantium", a poem in which Yeats creates an allegory for Ireland, with its present artistic values, and also on Yeats's movement towards a higher artistic creation, disregarding the literary trends. The originality of his search for human love and spiritual connection provides uniqueness to his work, love and passion for people and respect for traditions. History, nowadays, as theme and concept used by artists, writers, and creators is connected to the self-reassuring concepts of world and art. The post-modern reception of Yeats's work finds a correlation between his heliocentric views and his multicolored perceptions, referring to multiple identifications of impersonality. And yet, one can state that W. B. Yeats saw history in a personal manner, exploring rather its subjective quality throughout his literary career. He was not admired, however, only for such views, but also for connecting and re-connecting with the establishing of a national literature, which in time could become entirely Irish.

II. THE SECOND COMING

W.B. Yeats was at the centre of the Irish literary movement. Yeats had a very long poetic creative career. The early poetry of Yeats is very much different in tone and temper from his later poetry. In the poetry produced till 1900, we have in Yeats' poetry, the quality of romanticism and mythological lore of the Pre- Raphaelite poets. There is a mystical dream like quality in his early poems. From 1900 onwards there came a change in Yeats' poetic outlook. The dreamer and lover of old far off things was shaken by the crude realities of life. Poetry for Yeats was now no more an escape from reality but became a grappling with the stern realities of the world. In the latter poems a note of suffering and sadness is clearly perceptible, romance and the fairy world are no longer there. Romantic Ireland is dead and gone. The dawn of an evil age is envisaged by the poet. 'The Second Coming' was written after the first World War. It is a comment on the decline of the traditional spiritual and Human values. After the first World War there was degeneration at all fronts throughout the world. There was an atmosphere of chaos and anarchy. It appeared that good old days were coming to an end.

Yeats believed that Civilization and Barbarisms occur in alternating phases. Each has a small beginning and gradually it spirals outwards and onwards becomes larger and larger, and at last it suddenly collapses and gives way to a new and opposed phase. At the close of the 20th century, Christianity seemed to be giving way to cruelty and ugliness. The first coming is the birth of Christ and 20 centuries of Christianity seem to be giving way to a monster of cruelty and ugliness, that is the Second Coming. The first eight lines of the poem describe the situation of the world after the first World War. The falconer has lost control over the falcon. It means that the world is out of its joint. There is no control, no law, no discipline. The centre can not hold and there is chaos and absolute anarchy. The traditional and moral values of life have been damaged beyond repair. The best people don not know, what is good for them and the worst people are full of 'passionate intensity'. In other words, an atmosphere of fanaticism and violence has overtaken everything.

The next part of the poem expresses the poet's apprehension that a second coming, that is after the first coming (birth of Christ) a monster of violence and cruelty was to come. Yeats gets a vision of this second coming as a vast shape with head of a man and the body of a lion. This figure has a pitiless gaze and the whole effect is terrifying. The images in the poem give the impression that 20 centuries of Christianity and civilization is about to give way to Barbarism in which there will be cruelty and savagery. The poem, 'The Second Coming' shows technical skill of Yeats. The poem is very compact, each word and each line contribute to the fine effect. Words are very appropriate and effective they reveal or represent the emotion which is their purpose.

III. LEDA AND SWAN

'Leda and Swan' is a depiction of a violent sexual encounter between a woman and a bird. Yeats has described how Leda was raped by Zeus, a god in the form of a swan and how this copulation led to the destruction of the city of Troy. Zeus considered to be a wise god, one day infatuated by her beauty after seeing her naked while she was bathing in the river, 'Furatos', raped her. Leda could not understand for a moment, what it was, which came over her body and overpowered her. She staggered to make herself free but all was in vain. The bird caught her nape in his beak and forced to lie down. She caressed the thighs of Leda, he rubbed his body against her breast. The union of the human (Leda) with the superhuman (Zeus) led to birth of the heroes and heroines who created the Athenian Civilization. The outcome of the act of this copulation is Helen, who is responsible not only for the Trojan war but also for the death of Agamemnon, who was killed by his wife. According to Greek myth, Leda was raped by God Zeus in the form of a swan. Leda laid eggs which hatched into Clytemnestra and Helen and the war gods Caster and Polydeuces, and thereby brought about the Trojan War. The Greek Helen, the most beautiful women in the world ran away with Paris of Troy so the Greeks besieged the city of Troy. After the war Clytemnestra, the wife of the Greek leader had her husband murdered. Agamemnon was murdered by Aegisthus, the lover of his wife. Thus, the rape of Leda was the source of great political turbulence, anarchy and blood-shed. In the poem, "the broken wall, the burning roof and Tower and Agamemnon dead" all these refer to the great turbulence and blood-shed which was the consequence of the violent act, rape. For a woman like Leda it was impossible to make herself free from the 'feathered Glory', she felt weak against the massive force of Zeus. She started feeling that the bird had already overpowered and the rape was almost complete. The final question that arises out of the whole episode is whether any positive gains also come out of this sexual act. In another term, when Leda was caught up like this when she was being mastered in this way by the 'brute' blood of the air (Zeus), was she able to take on to herself part of the divine knowledge and power of Zeus before he became indifferent to her? The question, "Did she put on his knowledge with his power?" is a rhetorical question.

The poet ends the poem by suggesting that Leda did not gain the Divine Knowledge of the god, Zeus but his violence only. From the questions of the second and last stanza of the poem we also see that not only human beings but also gods themselves are part of universal pattern of events and they must play their roles in history. It is believed that the Divine power comes to human world once in every 2000 years. Civilization and Barbarism come in alternating currents. It is believed that after 2000 years of Civilization comes Barbarism which remains for another 2000 years. It comes in the form of a violent animal that forcefully rapes some important women to give birth to children who will bring about the end of existing culture and civilization. According to W.B. Yeats, the civilization brought by the birth of Christ was caused by such an indirect spiritual contact of the Divine Power with Mary in Jerusalem. After that Barbarism comes again with a contact between the Divine and human being. The birth of the most beautiful women Helen and her sister Clytemnestra in Greece was caused by violent rape of the Greek queen Leda by the god Zeus in the form of swan, the sexual intercourse between Leda and the Swan not only resulted in the birth of Helen and Clytemnestra but also the new era of physical violence and destruction of the Greek culture and civilization.

The poem can be seen as a criticism of beauty too. Helen is criticized for lack of wisdom. She left her legitimate husband and eloped with Paris which was so much devastating that it created havoc all around. Similarly, beautiful Clytemnestra killed her own husband. It is an act which could never be forgiven. Both women had beauty but no knowledge at all. Yeats criticizes beauty where there is lack of wisdom. Beauty without knowledge can be devastating and the above poem serves the same example. Leda and the Swan is a sonnet traditional 14 line poem in iambic pentameter. The structure of the sonnet is Petrarchan with a clear separation between the first eight lines and the final six lines. The sonnet is a powerful description of the union between the human and the Divine. Yeats combines words indicating powerful action – 'Sudden blow', 'Staggering', 'Shudder', 'Mastered', 'Burning' with adjectives and descriptive words that indicate Leda's weakness and helplessness- 'Caressed' 'helpless', 'terrified', 'vague', 'loosening', this increases the sensory impact of the poem. This poem is a perfect blend of mythological story and Yeats' conception about history.

IV. A COAT

Although the poem 'A Coat' seems simple, short and easy to read, it hides a great symbolic depth. The poem opens with the poet himself talking directly about his poetry which he calls 'Song' and 'Coat', here is a metaphor for the poems of W.B. Yeats. Although the [poem is very short and appears to be simple, it encourages divergent critical opinion. However the two most common interpretations are – firstly, the poet is talking about his style of writing poetry and secondly, the poet is talking about the political atmosphere of the country.

Yeats' 'A Coat' refers to his stylistic change in poetry. He is casting off the old rhetorical, ornate style of 'embroidery' for a new, simple realistic style of 'walking naked'. The coat is the poet's romanticism that he is abandoning and the 'walking naked' is the state of modernism he is adopting. His early style of poetry was overladen with literary ornaments but as he advanced in age there came maturity in his poetry and poetic style. He felt that to express something in an unadorned, simple and straight forward manner is the greatness of the

poetry. The line: "there is more enterprise in walking naked" implies this kind of greatness. Thus, Yeats in his latter part of poetic career eliminated ornamented poetic language, easy rhyme and rhythm and what he put in their place were the qualities evident in the poem, 'A Coat' - conversational speech, irregular rhythm and imperfect rhyme and above all simplicity of style. The poem is juxtaposition of the poet being adorned with a coat and being naked. The coat is a complex multilayered metaphor. The poem is concerned not only with the style of writing poetry but also it has connotations of political atmosphere of Yeats' Ireland.

The poem, 'A Coat' was written when the Irish Nationalist Movement was at its climax. Yeats along with being a poet, associated himself with the politics of the country. Yeats had a number of supporters and his opponents too were not less than his supporters. When Yeats says that, "I made my song a coat from hill to throat" he uses coat as something which protects a person from the inclement cruel cold. 'Coat' literally is a protective garment the poet made his song or his poetry a coat. His poetry worked as a protective garment for him. By his poetry he has achieved a status so high that could not be easily reached and attacked by his opponents. So his poem seems to be a coat decorated with embroideries of old mythologies which could protect him from his political opponents. Some other people in the camp of Yeats, tried to take the advantage of Yeats and his poetry in their political battle. The poet calls them fools who tried to use his poetry and they used it in such a manner as if they had created it. Yeats was known for his political message with his poems but he stopped politicizing them. As a result of this, he had to face some pressure and opposition. His poetry was used against opposing political parties and movements, but his party members later felt aggrieved that his poetry was less militant and more romanticized. While Yeats shared some political views with his party members, he verbally attacks them calling them 'fools' for misusing his poetry. Yeats feels angry that not only is his poetry being stolen and misused but he does not get any credit for it either. This is what he means by- "Wore it in the world's eyes as if they wrought it". Yeats in his politics is determined to maintain his political stand and he is also aware that his particular stand on politics may cause some people to desert him. In the concluding lines of the poem - "there is more enterprise in walking naked", Yeats is telling himself that one is at peace and has a clear conscience with oneself, one does not need to worry what happens. There is a great bravery in walking alone. Thus, 'Coat' in the poem is a metaphor having multilayered meaning. The poem is good example of verse, a style very popular in modern poetry.

V. SAILING TO BYZANTIUM

'Sailing to Byzantium' is one of the later poems of Yeats. Yeats had become old and Ireland was a place where in his old age he had become misfit. In Ireland, the world seems completely belonging to the young. The young people are absorbed in sensual pleasure. Old age excludes a man from the sensual joys of youth. So, the poet is on mental voyage; he has left his country and is sailing to Byzantium. Byzantium is the old name of Constantinople which was the capital of Roman empire. Constantinople was the centre of ancient art and culture. Things of art are symbols of eternity and spirituality and old man cannot enjoy sensual pleasure but certainly he can derive pleasure from the beauty of artistic things. So, the poet is sailing to Byzantium. The country, the poet had left (Ireland) is not a fit place for an old man. This is the place where all are engaged in sensual play which makes them neglect ageless artistic achievements of the great intellect. In that country the 'dying generations of birds' and young lovers rejoice in those worldly pleasure which are temporal. The young lovers who are in each others' arms, the birds which are in the trees and the Salmon-falls and the mackerel crowded seas, fish, flesh and fowl, all are engaged in sensual pleasure. They all sing only one song that is the song of sensual pleasure. The poet has become old, sensual pleasure do not attract him so he has sailed from Ireland and is going to Byzantium.

The poet says that "an aged man is but a poultry thing". He looks like a scare-crow and he is quite out of a place here (Ireland) he cannot sing the sensual song. The only alternative available for an old is to have his soul educated in such a way that it starts to clap its hands and sing. In his old age, he is unable to sing sensual song so now he should be able to enjoy a spiritual song. This newly learnt song of the soul has to become louder and louder as the physical powers of the old man go from bad to worse. He needs a school where the soul can get educated in such a song. Such a school is difficult to find in that country because every singing school instead of caring for 'monuments of unaging intellect is busy studying the 'monuments of its own magnificence'. In other words, the poet means to say that living in Ireland he could not train himself to enjoy a spiritual things.

So, the poet has left his country and in the third stanza he is already in Byzantium. Byzantium is a city, famous for its church of Saint Sofia but it is also centre of art which is symbol of permanence and spirituality. In Byzantium on a wall painting the poet saw some sage standing near a holy fire. Addressing the sages, standing in God's holy fire in Byzantium the poet says to them to 'consume his heart away'; Yeats wished to be free from his decaying body. He yearns for freedom of the soul which is fastened to a 'dying animal'. The poet requests the sages to come down and be the educators of his soul so that his soul can learn the right kind of song that is the spiritual song which gives eternal pleasure.

The poet wishes to leave his body transformed into a work of art. He wants to be one of the golden birds in the palace of Theophilus, the ancient emperor in Byzantium. The poet says that once he is out of this body he

will break all contact with natural things that is with the physical world. He will identify himself with spirituality by being a golden bird designed by Greek artists. The song of these birds is supposed to be different from the sensual song.

The poem seeks to expose the transitory and superficial nature of worldly joys. Sensual pleasure is short lived and it attracts only those who are young. The poet has presented beautiful images contrasting between the sensual world and the artificial world of eternity. The phrase 'monuments of unageing intellect' is contrasted with sensual world represented by fish flesh, or fowl'. The poem presents two worlds- on the one hand there is Irish world of sensual pleasure and on the other hand there is the city of Byzantium which is a symbol of artistic spiritual perfection and immortality. In his old age, it is in the lap of spirituality that he (Poet) hopes to find pleasure.

VI. AMONG SCHOOL CHILDREN

'Among School Children' was written in the later part of Yeats' literary career. In 1926, Yeats visited Waterford Convent School as Senator of Ireland. While visiting the school, the poet was reminded of the woman he loved. He realizes that his beloved, Maud Gonne, too, must have looked like the beautiful school children, and all at once the pendulum swings back to her present image that she might have grown old. He thinks about himself also that before he became old and ugly, he was handsome. In the poem, that is cluster of contrasts between youth and old age.

In the present poem, the poet seems to be saying two things - everyone has to grow old one day and this fact has to be accepted, the second thing he says is that both body and Soul are of equal importance they together constitute life. The poet used his own personal experience to elucidate theme of the poem. Something very personal like love experiences have been transmuted into a theme of Universal importance. In stanza VI, the great philosophers like Plato, Aristotle and Pythagoras have been mentioned. But the poet says that they are nothing but scare-crows like the poet himself. Philosophers had worked so long with their idea yet they could not escape being old. Time had taken away their physical vitality. The meaning is that the philosophers in spite of their learning could not prevent old age from coming. The nun and the mother worship their own kind of images. A mother thinks of a son as he was in the cradle, she never thinks that one day her child would grow old and die. The nun sees eternity and holiness in the stillness of marble or bronze statues. Both the nun and the mother are disappointed in their images they worship. Sons disappoint their mothers by growing old and infirm and the stone images cause grief and pain to the nun because they never change. Both the pious nun and affectionate mother worship illusions.

In the last stanza, the poet has compared life to a chestnut tree. Life is a combination of things like the chestnut tree which is neither leaf nor blossoms nor trunk but a combination of all these. In the same way, dance cannot be separated from a dancer. The dancer and her dance movements are inseparable:

"O chestnut tree, great rooted blossomer,
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?
O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
How can we know the dancer from the dance?"

The body should not be tortured for the sake of the soul. The body and the soul are not two opposite entities. Both should exist in harmony. Most of Yeats' themes like love for Maud Gonne, his views on relationship between art and the artist and the concept of the unity of being, find a complex and synthetic expression in 'Among School Children' which is remarkable for its thematic, textural art and symbolic richness. Edmund Wilson asserts:

"the actual sense in the Convent the personal emotions it awakens and the general speculation which those emotions suggest, have been interwoven and made to play upon each other, at the same time that they are kept separate and distinct"