Chapter – 3

W.B. Yeats: Revival of Tradition

I see my life go drifting like a river
From change to change I have been many Things-

W. B. Yeats “Fergus and the Druid” 23

Ireland has two faces, religious and political but the visage of landscape continues to appear in the Irish literature. Hence, a literary tradition evolves from the natural resources like water, tree, stones etc. that could well transform those natural subjects into cultural objects. They serve the purpose of the modern poets to frame their major symbols in their poems. The three-tier symbols, the water, the tree and the stone are eco-morphic and what is living in Irish tradition that finds expression in the poetry of W.B.Yeats.

W.B. Yeats has been considered a grand master of Irish poetry in English. “Poetry is not the thing said”, quoting Housman’s lecture, Michael Hamburger says, “but a way of saying it”(22). However, in the case of Yeats’ poetry, what is said also draws the attention of the readers. In his poems ‘a common, non-Christian stock of myths and ideas – of symbols seem to have a particular fascination’ (F.A.C. Wilson, 17). The symbolic representation of mythical or legendary elements and persons is temporal. They relate the past to present or vice versa, whereas the symbols derived from the landscape sources concretize the poetic meaning that extends up to its culture area. Also, they have their single focal point merging both in time and space. ‘Water’ is one of the major symbols widely used across the world by poets. When it flows above, it causes rain and when it flows down it forms streams and rivers. As Dictionary of Symbols interprets, “water symbolizes terrestrial and natural life, never metaphysical life” (347). The tree is one of
the most important traditional symbols and it is profusely used in poetry. Trees are mostly related to gods in mythology. In general, “the symbolism of the tree denotes the life of the cosmos, its consistence, growth, proliferation, generative and regenerative processes. It stands for inexhaustible life, and is therefore equivalent to a symbol of immortality” (328). The tree, moreover, stands for upward trend as its branches rising to the sky and hence is related to other symbols like ladder and mountain.

The stone is also frequently used by poets and is closely associated with the other earth symbols. “Stone is a symbol of being, of cohesion and harmonious reconciliation with self” (299). Moreover, hardness and durability of stone have impressed men, suggesting to them the antithesis to biological things subject to the laws of change, death and decay. Earth and its environment inevitably comprise these natural elements that have been center of attraction to the poets since the remote past. This chapter discusses how W.B.Yeats has drawn this three-tier symbolism from the land, where he was born and brought up to articulate his poetic, philosophical and traditional outlook.

One of his popular poems, “The Wild Swan At Coole” in which all the three symbols, the water, the tree and the stone, besides the swans, have found their poetic setting that expands as a beautiful Irish landscape:

The trees are in their autumn beauty,
The woodland paths are dry,
Under the October twilight the water
Mirror a still sky;
Upon the brimming water among the stones
Are nine-and-fifty swans (85).
In Celtic mythology Aengus or Oengus, son of Dagda and Boann, was the water deity who was very fond of the company of swans, which he transformed into passionate kisses (Thierry Bordas 36) and ‘the swans symbolize the souls of lovers’ (F.A.C.Wilson—Yeats’s Iconography, 197). Yeats sets, in the first stanza of the poem, the scene describing the “autumn beauty” of trees and paths at Coole, Lady Gregory’s estate, in the October twilight. He is like the Celtic water deity, Aengus passionately watching the swans that were delightful to his eyes. With a few words Yeats has brilliantly created a fantastic land painting that he has managed to merge both mythical and spatial elements within a single frame. The three fold symbols of water, tree and stone with its seasonal atmosphere, i.e. autumn, provides a wide Irish setting against which Yeats has recreated the events of remote past. Moreover, the abstract meaning of the poem that life continues through death is concretized by this spatial background. Tree grows, water flows but stone remains static beyond such changes. Young one would become old facing death and was desperate at the loss of love and delight as ‘the swans had flown away’ but the stone exists and the birds to visit it. Yeats believes in the solidity of life after death. Thus Yeats locates his self in the Irish landscape that he uses as a medium to express his strong belief in rebirth. The Celts naturally believed in ‘immortality of soul’. Thus the Irish landscape becomes the part of the poet’s immortal consciousness.

Another popular poem, “The Second coming” that is a political as well as a religious text, in which Yeat’s favorite image ‘gyre’ suggests that history repeats. Water, “the blood-dimmed tide” dominates the setting in the first part of the poem. The “ceremony of innocence is drowned” draws on the water-cult of sacrifice practiced by the Celtic people. By this expression the poet anticipates the second coming of a wild beast, “a shape with lion body and the head of a man”, ironically expressed against the second
coming of Christ that would trouble his sight, “from somewhere in sands of the desert”. The star in the desert at the time of first coming is a pilgrimage but in the second coming, threatening. Here the water is antithetically used against the desert. Water symbolizes rebirth where as desert stands for death but both merged in a religious context giving the meaning of Resurrection. It is also associated with night, as the poet knows it ‘that twenty centuries of stony sleep/were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle’. It is the fear that inspires the poet visualizing this “vast image out of Spiritus Mundi”. Desert and water is a contrast between fear and promise. Water is a cleansing symbol. ‘Spiritus Mundi’ is wealth of the past. The poet generates the meaning of fear, uncertainty and mortality by means of the water cult. In the earlier poem, also water suggests the flow of time, ageing and the threat of death. The essential Christian theme is hope and redemption. The moving animal of savagery from the deserts does not promise hope to the poet. The three wise men travel to the Christ in Bethlehem after 2000 years and the case is reversed. The sphinx is moving towards the man. Desert becomes a symbol of no promise but just a flow of time with no assurance. It is said that the Celts were known for the ancestral fears supported animist beliefs and favoured the birth of new divinities’ (Thierry Bordas 24). Thus, the poem is composed on the conflict between Irish paganism and Christianity in which the Celtic mythical elements are related to Irish land through its water cult. And, the “strong sleep” is a strong expression, which denotes death in general, tomb in particular. On the other hand, it is also associated with resurrection/rebirth as stone symbolizes something unchanged existing on the earth.

‘The ancestral fear’ in Yeats’ unconsciousness is evident in his “Easter 1916” also. The poem is political in tone voicing for the leaders shot dead in ‘Rising’. The refrain in the poem ‘a terrible beauty is born’ may be referred to Cernunnos who was in
Gaelic mythology revered as Sun God of fertility, ‘who has the torc, the purse and the sack of grain’ (Thierry Bordas 28). Easter is associated with rejuvenating of life on earth. The ‘terrible beauty’ can also be viewed as patriotic passion that Yeats has gained from the happening of political events like Rising and also from the heroes of Irish legends and folklore. One among them was Finn who, riding a grey horse fought constantly at the head of his companions”(Thierry Bordas 44). And he also possessed the talents of divines:

A horse-hoof slides on the brim
And a horse plashes within it,
The long-legged moor-hen dive,
And hens to moor-cocks call;
Minute by minute they live
The stone’s in the midst of all (Easter 1916 120-121).

Yeats’ war spirit which is one of the major characteristic feature of Irish people could well be read by these lines and the ‘stone’ image is used as it witnesses this ever living protesting spirit of Ireland. Moreover, he traces a political history of Ireland through the foot prints left behind him by the leaders of Irish war of Independence and that still continues in the land; it is too long a sacrifice and he seems to be helpless to say:

Our part to murmur name upon name
As a mother names her child
When sleep at last has come
On limbs that had run wild
What is it but nightfall?
No, no, not night but death;(121).
In fact, “Celtic warriors considered the world of dead as a sort of extension of their life on earth” (Thierry Bordas 34). Through his pen, using it as a weapon, Yeats poses himself as a warrior of Ireland and finds himself one among the mighty ‘hearts with one purpose alone/though summer and winter seem/Enchanted to a stone/To trouble the living stream. ‘The living stream’ refers to the contemporary political situation that occurred because of British occupied Ireland and is temporal likely to be changed and the poet’s wish that it is likely to be disturbed by their solid faith of the spirit of freedom which is well substantiated by the stone image. Stream is bouncy, uncontrolled, fresh and young. It cannot be stopped. It washes away the stones and little vegetation. But at the same time, it adds music and beauty to the landscape. From that sense, it could be equated with hope.

The sea imagery has been deeply buried in Yeats’ unconsciousness, as it is a part of Irish landscape. In his popular poem “A prayer for my Daughter”, Yeats presents a stormy scene that he witnessed from Lady Gregory’s estate. He draws an analogy between his gloomy mood and stormy sea:

Once more the storm is howling, and half hid
Under this cradle-hood and coverlid
My child sleeps on. There is no obstacle
But ‘Gregory’s Wood and one bare hill
Whereby the haystack-and roof- leveling
Bred on the Atlantic, can be strayed;
And for an hour I have walked and prayed
Because of the great gloom that is in my mind (125).
He is much disturbed by the anxiety that how his child would grow matured and become an aristocratic lady. And, he wished that ‘she may live like some green laurel/Rooted in one dear perpetual place’. It is interesting to note that the tree and the sea are interwoven so amply as to represent survival that evolves from Irish landscape which has never been changed and the people of Ireland are still existing but with such ecological disturbances. The poem has not drawn on Christian means of prayer. His intention is that his daughter should live like a tree ‘rooted in one dear perpetual place’. This expression is an elaboration of his land consciousness as Celtic people were much concerned for their land and nature worship. It has been observed by the historian Thomas Rolleston quoting Dr. Douglas Hyde who said about the Ulster heroes declaring to their king:

Heaven is above us, and earth beneath us, and the sea is round about us.

Unless the sky shall fall with its showers of stars on the ground where we are camped … or unless the waves of the blue sea come over the forest, of the living world, we shall not give ground. (Thomas Rolleston, ebook 6)

No doubt, the poetic phrase, “murderous innocence of the sea” could echo the poet’s mindfulness in the relationship with the ancestral attitude towards their ecological sources like water/sea. By developing such setting of vast landscape, Yeats speaks of the survival instinct not only of his daughter but also of his Irish community. It has gained strength and energy from the seasonal strong wind like Shelley’s ‘West Wind’ blown over the land from hard sea and so Yeats believes that his daughter could obtain this racial character of Irish past, ‘bartering that horn and every quad/By quiet natures understood /for an old bellows full of angry wind’. The poet also asserts that the soul recovers radical innocence/And learns at last that it is self-delighting/self-appearing, self-affrighting. Thus, the poet’s esoteric parental care finds tradition as an inevitable force to
nurture Irishness in the minds of young generation and so he associates the tree imagery with the spreading ceremony and custom that spread cultural values:

Ceremony’s name for the rich horn
And custom for the spreading laurel tree (Prayer for…127)

Thus Yeats’ regaining of his strength from his Irish environmental sources as well as forces is explicitly seen in another short poem, ‘A Meditation in the Time of War’ and with a war spirit, he speaks:

For one throb of the artery,
While on that old grey stone I sat
Under the old wind-broken tree,
I knew that one is animate(135).

The striking feature of the imagery “that old grey stone” is that it might be a tomb lay horizontally and stands not only for dead but also for the strength spread all over the land of Ireland. For, in the Celtic tradition, the tombs of dead warriors were considered places of worship. Indeed, the old stone and old wind-broken tree are symbolic representation of the age-old fighting disposition against invasions in the past and occupants in the present; it is the political reality that the every Irish man traditionally lives with. The stone image is recurrently used by Yeats and in “The Man And The Echo” the same voice is heard,

In a cleft that’s christened Alt
Under broken stone I halt
At the bottom of a pit
That broad noon has never lit,
And shout a secret to the stone. (221)
The stone is personified as if it were listening to his secret that is known to every Irish man that removal of English power from the country. To Yeats, Ireland is his motherland but now this land has been withered losing her glorious inheritance because of many an invasion she has suffered. The spirit of nativity is one of the dominant features in his poems. The poems from *The Tower* are evidences that could well prove Yeats’ concern for his soil and his people who are now “dying generations”.

“Sailing to Byzantium” probably Yeats’ most famous poem, which has been the center of attraction for many critics expresses its careful oppositions of aged and youth and so does Irish past and present; Byzantium was a great center of mosaic art and metal enameling flourished in the Roman Empire. Yeats is not satisfied with the present living condition of Ireland where he was born and brought up and considers that the country is unsuitable for old men. The poem elaborates the path from which the poet sets out for Byzantium, the land of art and philosophy. He sails from Ireland where “monuments of unaging intellect” are neglected. The sailing symbolically stands for his interior journey that begins in the vast seascape of Ireland, as sea is the inseparable part of Irish landscape, which is deeply buried in the mind of the poet. It has been viewed by many critics that Byzantium referred by Yeats was the capital of Eastern wing of the Roman Empire, which has a metaphorical significance that it is a city of mind. Before the Roman invasions, Ireland had been known for its perfect work of art such as weapons made by the goldsmiths of ancient Greece and Rome out of hammered gold or gold enameling. Marking the peak of Celtic civilization, Thierry Bordas writes in his *Celtic Mythology*, “Celtic art evolved, adopting many eastern motifs in the torcs, fibula, belt buckles, bracelets etc. The technique of the craftsmen seems remarkable not only did they work with bronze and gold but also with glass and enamel”(16). He also traces the history of
Celtic tribes who, in the 3rd and 4th century B.C, invaded the Greek-Roman world and took possession of Italy and penetrated Macedonia and Thessaly. Hence, there is a possibility to compare the holy city of Byzantium with a city of Celtic land. And, ‘the sages standing in God’s holy fire/As in the gold mosaic wall/come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre’, are ancestral masters of Yeats’ soul. Yeats believes that they could purify his heart of all sensual passion. “Gyre” is no doubt a powerful image that reveals how the poet is psychologically disturbed by his racial memory that repeats to gather him “into the artifice of eternity”. Thus, Byzantium is an image of Celtic-Irish space, once popular for its arts and crafts, where one can locate the poet’s self. So, Byzantium is a metaphorical expression of an Irish space and sailing to Byzantium is Yeats’ spiritual journey that begins from Ireland, the present to Ireland, the past. Thus according to Yeats there is a correspondence between Ireland and Byzantium and also Byzantium “might well symbolize a new Ireland breaking away from its masters so that it might develop its own philosophical, religious and artistic destiny”(T.R. Henn, 222).

Moreover, the imagery of “The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas” is drawn from the visual memory of Irish ecological history. T. R. Henn elaborates his view and says, “Sligo River drops through the town in a series of shallow falls where fish run up to Lough gill, and the memory is that of spring and the magnificent strength and grace of the leaping fish, itself magical and a symbol of strength in Celtic literature” (225). The poem has its base on ‘the persistent nostalgia for this strength’ and this nostalgia has been used as a medium through which Yeats would articulate his culture past. Thus, sailing is associated with water imagery and the flow of water always connects as well as separates two lands, the stream of time also temporally connects the past with present and also disconnects the present from the past. Also, in the poem Byzantium that was written as
the sequel to “Sailing to Byzantium” after an interval of three years, the sea imagery is a dominant one and, (the Byzantium has been considered a country of mind) it stands for the sea of time. As if the poet does stand on the shores of Byzantium and surveys the scene around, Byzantium is the place exists outside time and space. It is a country of the mind with “all complexities of mire or blood”.

Mire is the swampy or muddy land, which represents the Irish land. The last line of the poem, “that dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea”, suggests that Ireland has been existing across the time, she is struggling to survive, and according to Yeats, as he calls it, ‘death-in-life and life-in-death’ that has been represented by this imagery:

In glory of changeless metal

Common bird, or petal

And all complexities of mire or blood (Byzantium 173).

Thus, ‘mire (stagnant) and blood’ (moving life) are key images of the poem and they trace the bloody political history of Ireland. Moreover, Byzantium has no reality but Yeats makes it real by providing Irish elements with “complexities of mire or blood”.

Though the poem emphasizes the need for suffering and purification and a sense of the surpassing superiority of art over life, it never fails to focus on the paganism evolved from the sacrifice and salvation rite that is represented by the imagery of dolphin, and Dictionary of symbols suggests, “The dolphin by itself is an allegory of salvation, inspired in the ancient legends which show it as the friend of man. Its figure is associated …with pagan, erotic deities and with other symbols”(81). The last stanza of the poem is thus ritualistic in setting sharing the complexities of both Christian faith and pagan art:

Astraddle on the dolphin’s mire and blood,

Spirit after spirit! The smithies break the flood,
The golden smithies of the Emperor!
Marbles of the dancing floor
Break bitter furies of complexity
Those images that yet
Fresh images beget,

The dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea (Byzantium 174).

The tension between two forces ‘sex and religion’ (T.R. Henn, 235) is metaphorically linked with “Flood and bitter furies of complexity” which T.R, Henn calls ‘water and fire’. And, “the sea’s rhythm is governed by the opposing stresses of God and sexuality’(Daniel Alberight, 58). On the other hand, in Celtic water cult, the water spirits were appeased by the divine offerings and particularly fish, were of such divinity. In both the Byzantium poems, sea could be considered an object of Irish nature myth. The ‘irrational stream’ evolved from this sea myth is the strength of these complex poems, particularly of the later poem. Yeats’ handling of the dolphin image that is well embedded into the sea imagery draws the readers’ attention once again when it occurs in the poem, “News for the Delphic Oracle” from his collection, Last Poems. His passionate attempt to re-live his own culture past is expressed in the following lines but in paradoxical tone,

Straddling each a dolphin’s back
And steadied by a fin
Those Innocents re-live their death,
Their wounds open again (174).
His concern for the people of the past is recurrent in his poems, as he grew old; to him the sea is blissful because it carries with it the memories of his lost generations yet they might be of painful experiences:

The ecstatic waters laugh because
Their cries are sweet and strange,
Through their ancestral patterns dance,
And the brute dolphins plunge
Until in some cliff-sheltered bay
Where wades the choir of love
Proffering its sacred laurel crowns,
They pitch their burdens off (News for the Delphic, 216).

The phrase, ‘Cliff-sheltered bay’ emerges as romantic beauty in which both water and stone are symbolic representations of time and space respectively, “that pitch their burdens off” in the present Ireland. It is also suggestive of the continuity of past through present as the poet is a traditionalist admiring always his Irish tradition.

However, Yeats was to some extent recipient of Greek art and myths. Irish as well as Greek mythic personalities often appear in his poems:

Man-picker Niamh and sighed
By Oisin on the grass;
There sighed amid his choir of love
Tall Pythagoras.
And the last lines of this poem read thus:
Foul goat-head, brutal arm appear,
Belly, shoulder, bum
Flash fishlike- nymphs and satyrs
Copulate in the foam.
As all lives are generated from water the images of his mind are also derived from the source of water, which represents the continuity of time.

The sea image is persistent in his poems and through this life force Yeats tries to bring forth the tragic generations of his native land. He may recollect the sad stories of his Irish heroes of Oisin or Cuchulain, but they are the national symbols of self-sacrifice and heroism that have been recurrently acknowledged by the Irish poets of the past and present; Yeats, of course, in “The Wandering of Oisin” gives life to such characters:

And we rode on the plains of the sea’s edge; the

Sea’s edge barren and grey,

Grey sand on the green of the grasses and over

The dripping trees,

Dripping and doubling land ward, as though they

Would hasten away,

Like an army of old men longing for rest from

The moan of the sea (2).

Though Oisin was the poet of the Fenian cycle of legend centered on the military order of the Fianna, of which Finn was the head, and he has been entered the soul of Yeats himself and likely to continue to be so in the feature writing of Irish men. So the wandering is not of time bound, as Timothy Webb comments on this long narrative poem:

The events it describes … are supposed to have taken place rather in the indefinite period, made up of many periods, described by the folk-tales, than in any particular century; it therefore, like the later Fenian stories themselves, mixes much that is mediaeval with much that is ancient (230)
and it is much of modern too. The continuity is “in a long iron sleep, as a fish in the water goes/dumb as a stone”. As any myth is the mixture of both death and life that are significantly represented again by the images of water and stone. Even in the stanza cited from “The Wandering of Oisin”, Ireland’s landscape is in miniature exhibited: “Grey sand on the green of the grasses and over/ the dripping trees”, in which ‘dripping’ is suggestive of water linked with tree that stands for the living moments of myths as well as spirit of the past. Throughout the narration Oisin, the mythic poet of Ireland, moving across many islands and finally reaches Ireland. His characterization is depicted along with the painted seascape. The tidal noise, which is the inner rhythm of the poet’s soul, is, as Oisin’s voice to utter:

Wrap in the wave of that music, with weariness
more than of earth,
The moil of my centuries filled me; and gone like
A sea-covered stone
Were the memories of the whole of my sorrow
and the memories of the whole of my mirth
And a softness came from the starlight and filled
me full to the bone (5).

Oisin spends his last hundred years on the subtlest island and when he returns to Ireland he rejoins human toil. His wandering and coming to rest are amply described by the imagery ‘a sea-covered stone’. Daniel Albreight’s view is that ‘he sleeps and forgets; but he dreams, and in those dreams he creates … a vision of the heroic passed’ (110).

Here, the stone is a hidden faith of solidity in life covered by vast and deep flux of nature that is represented by the sea. This is a complex poem in which the protagonist is
wandering between immortality and mortality, between dream of desire, between youth and old age, between myth and reality, between past and present and between life and death. Finally at the foot of the mountain, Oisin lends his hands to two men carrying a sack full of sand and at once he helps the mortals, his immortality is gone away forever; he falls on the path and says:

“My years three hundred fell on me, and I
rose, and walked on the earth,
A creeping old man, full of sleep, with the spittle
on his beard never dry (12)

………..

I throw down the chain of small stones! When life
in my body has ceased,
I will go to Caoilte and Conan and Bran,
Sceolan, Lomair,
And dwell in the house of the Fenians, be they in flames or at feast (13-14).

Thus, Yeats’ vision reveals his desire to give birth to native mythic personalities and events. The throwing of chain of small stones down are much associated with both space and time and to Yeats, Ireland is earthly paradise, as “Oisin has filled the most ethereal of the islands with human heroism, all the exhilaration and joy of human experience”(Daniel Albright, III).

Yeats has restored this poem to its true chronological position, the beginning of his literary career. For, it sets the tone for much of Yeats’ later works and one of the great subjects of his poetry, change verses changelessness. Oisin is made immortal youth by a
faery’s (Niamh) spell, but still he longs for his old human surroundings. At last, having lost his eternal youth through a compassionate human impulse, he rages against the sorrows of old age. It reveals that Yeats persistently shows his concern for old age. Many years later Yeats wrote “The Circus Animals Desertion (one of his last poems) with the same content:

What can I but enumerate old themes?
First that sea-rider Oisin led by the nose
Through three enchanted islands, allegorical dreams,
Vain gaiety, vain battle, vain repose,
Themes of the embittered heart (223)

Thus, the sea often has a special symbolic significance for Yeats.

“The Indian to His love” from “Cross ways” is another sample poem that reveals Yeats’ romantic spirit drawn on Irish flora and fauna:

The heavy boughs, the burnished dove
That moans and sighs a hundred days;
Vapoury footsole by the water’s drowsy blaze (15).

This poem was first published as “An Indian Song” in the Dublin University Review, December 1886. And Yeats reported in it how he had composed this poem

When I first wrote I went here and there for my subjects as my reading led me, and preferred to all other countries Arcadia and the India of romance, but presently I convinced myself …that I should never go for the scenery of a poem to any country but my own (Timothy Webb 232).

Any great poet for this matter would solely rely on his/her native sources and nature myths. Yeats is not an exceptional and, as T.R. Henn rightly points out: “Yeats was
concerned always with what he called ‘the book of the people’, (Yeats last poem, John Stall Worthy, 130) and Yeats had a gift of nature that would have enabled him to catch the very tone and accent of the country side. The roaming spirits are painted in the poem by his pen as ‘vapoury footsole by the water’s drowsy blaze’. Ireland is the country of spirits and they are well illustrated by the water imagery.

“The Stolen Child” is also absolutely drawn on Irish landscape setting. The places (Sleuth Wood, Rosses, Glen-car) mentioned in the poem are in and around Sligo, the birthplace of W.B.Yeats. These are here rock points and it is believed that if anyone falls asleep on these rocks there is a danger of the fairies carrying off their souls. The refrain in the poem has its center at water imagery:

Come away, O human child
To the waters and the wild
With a fairy, hand in hand,
For the world’s more full of weeping than you can
Understand (19).

Rosses has a little sea-dividing sandy plain covered with short grass lying in the foam midway between two mountain ranges namely Knocknarea and Ben Bulben. “Fergus and the Druid”, was first published in the National Observer in 1982, written on the mythical theme that Fergus, The “Old king of the proud Red Branch Kings”, like Ulysses, leaving his kingdom to his son, Conchubar wandered on Irish lands:

I see my life go drifting like a river
From change to change I have been many
Things-
A green drop in the surge, a gleam of light
Upon a sword, a fir-tree on a hill,
An old slave grinding at a heavy quern
A king sitting upon a chair of gold-
And all these things were wonderful and great;
But now I have grown nothing, knowing all (23).

This poem is also narrated in Oisinian tone reflecting the greatness of sorrow by which one could fairly philosophize life. The phrases like, “murmuring sea”, “drifting like a river”, “fir tree on a hill”, “a weasel moving on from stone to stone” etc. add value to the poetic diction based on Irish nativity. Yeats gives life to the king of Celtic mythology by providing real space of Ireland that comprises rocks, mountains, woods, rivers and sea. Moreover, quern is an apparatus used by Irish people for grinding corn and it consists of two circular stones. This also takes a role in mythmaking. The same kind of stone grinders has been in use in Tamil Nadu, India since the ancient time.

The sea imagery is directly or indirectly referred to Cuchulain, the hero of Ulster, the real son of Lug who was the Sun God in Celtic tradition. Yeats’ popular narrative poems, “To the Rose upon Road of Time, “Cuchulain’s Fight with the sea” from his collection of poems, *Rose*, and one of his last poems “Circus Animal’s Desertion” and “On Baile’s Strand” deal with Cuchulain myth.

Cuchulain, according to Thierry Bordas, was the most popular among the heroes of Ulster at the time of Conchobar, king of Ireland. It is believed that he ruled at the beginning of first century B.C. The medieval texts point out that it might be an earlier period of La Tene, the period between third and second century B.C. Cuchulain’s mother was Dechtire who was daughter of the druid, Cathbad and sister of the king Conchobar whose “father was apparently Fergus MacRoich but his real father was none other than
Lug, who had loved Dechtire as the other world” (Thierry Bordas 40). Cuchulain was the husband of Emer and also became the lover of the beautiful Fand, wife of Manannan Mac Lir of Uatach. As a lover of Maud Gonne, Yeats might have found himself in the personality of the legendary hero Cuchulain who was known for his fighting spirit. He at last killed his son and died fighting the sea. Yeats dramatically elaborates Cuchulain fighting with the sea:

Cuchulain Stirred,

Stared on the horses of the sea, and heard

The cars of battle and his own name cried

And fought with the invulnerable tide. (26)

Thus, Cuchulain is portrayed as legendary warrior of the sea. Yeats might have cited the legendary figure in order to celebrate the heroic war instinct of Irish people. And, indeed, the hero’s struggle, suffering and his tragedy are given more importance than his professional bravery. This struggle for survival makes the poet realize the meaning of life and death. Thus, sea is inseparable from Cuchulain myth and from Yeats’ poems. In continuance of Fegus myth, Yeats wrote “The Man Who Dreamed of Faeryland”. The poem begins:

“He stood among a crowd at Dromahair”, which is in county Leitrim and other places mentioned in the beginning of every stanza of the poem are in county Sligo. It is also known for its supernatural setting:

His heart hung all upon a silken dress,

And he had known at last some tenderness,

Before earth took him to her stony care;

But when a man poured fish into a pile,
It seemed they raised their little silver heads
And sang what gold morning or evening sheds
Upon a woven world-forgotten isle
Where people love beside the raveled seas;(31).
The earth’s ‘stony care’, ‘the raveled seas’ and ‘Changeless roof of boughs’ in which the three fold symbols- stone, water and tree- are interwoven to represent the moments of living and dying and both are relatively same. If death is not living, life is not dying. Yeats uses these symbols to communicate the relationship between the birth and the death. Earth is one and stones, water and trees are different dimensions of the same earth.
These nature sources thus provide Yeats with the song of ‘gold morning and evening’ and using them as a medium of expression or artistic revelation. Yeats as a poet attempts to compose the music of both birth and death. Also, only through ‘art’ one can witness his life as well as death. Yeats seems celebrating both life and death. It is echoed in a small poem that has a longer title, ‘The Dedication to a Book of Stories selected from the Irish Novelists’, published in 1891:

Ah, Exiles wandering over lands and seas
And planning, plotting always that some morrow
May set a stone upon ancestral sorrow!
I also bear a bell-branch full of ease (34).
Setting ‘a stone upon ancestral sorrows’ is very old ritual of Celtic tradition; Yeats, a true poet who claims to belong to such a tradition, tries to perpetuate his racial memories over Irish myths and legends in this poem. The “Lamentation of the Old Pensioner” opens with water and tree symbols:
Although I shelter from the rain
Under a broken tree,
My chair was nearest to the fire (35).

Languishing for love and youthful spirit, Yeats shows his contempt for Time that has transfigured him into old age. Both rain and broken tree are appendages of time; rain stands for freshness and youth whereas broken tree for old age. And, any creative energy attempts to swim against the stream of time. Apparently poets always fear time and tend to challenge the consequences caused by time. His finding shelter under the broken tree is unavoidable but he could watch the rain of beauties, he says:

There is not a woman turns her face,
Upon a broken tree,
And yet the beauties that I loved
Are in my memory;
I spit into the face of Time
That has transfigured me (36).

His recollecting the Irish peasant tradition has well been rendered through the rain symbol. The poem that next appears in the collection is “The Old Pensioner”, which also speaks of the poet’s languorous state. He has a chair at every hearts and speaks:

The road - side trees keep murmuring -

... 

Green oak and poplar tree!
The well - known faces are all gone,
And the fret is on me.
The oak tree is closely associated with Celtic nature myth. “It was sacred to the Celts” (Dictionary of symbols 328). Yeats has presented a picturesque region full of oak trees. Pliny’s study on tree and plant worship of Celts points out that they choose ‘Oak-woods for their sacred groves and perform no sacred rite without using oak branches’ (Sacred Texts). Irish glossary gives ‘oak’ as an Irish name for god. Moreover, people living in oak region and existing in part on acorns, fruits of oak, might easily take the oak as a representative of the spirit of vegetation or growth. “It was long-lived, its foliage was a protection, it supplied food, its wood was used as fuel and it was thus clearly the friend of man”(Sacred Texts) <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/celt/rac-html>. It is also considered the embodiment of the spirits of life and growth. Dr. Eavans’ view is that the original holy object within the central triliths of stone henge was a sacred tree, an oak, image of the Celtic Zeus. The tree and the stone once associated with ancestor worship, and it has become symbols of “a more celestial spirit that those of departed human beings”(Sacred Texts).

The old pensioner, the poet himself, like the oak tree, takes the role of representing ‘the old days of his native land, that long gone by’. As the oak stands for the Celtic tradition that the poet longs for is voiced through his symbolic expression of “the road-side trees keep murmuring”. The same voice is heard in the “The ever lasting voices” from his collection, The Wind Among the Reeds, of which most of the poems are drawn on Celtic myths. In this small poem, the Irish landscape is filled with the voices of eternal past, the poet asks:

Have you not heard that our hearts are old,
That you call in birds, in wind on hill,
In shaken boughs, in tide on the shore?
O sweet everlasting Voices, be still (44).
Yeats has equally celebrated the beauty of mortal and immortal. Also, this everlasting voice of Yeats’ has its own rhythm in many of his poems.

“Into the Twilight” is the poem glorifies both dawn and dusk in same tone. He admires his native soil, Ireland as she ‘always young’ as ‘dew ever shining’. His dearness to earth, especially to his native land, expands form the stony hill to flowing water through greeny woods:

Come, heart, where hill is heaped upon hill:

For there the mystical brotherhood

Of sun and moon and hollow and wood

And drives and stream work out their will; (44)

“The song of Wandering Aengus” from the same collection acquires a universal appeal. This bases on the Aengus myth that merges both water and tree put together, for Aengus is the water deity (Thierry Bordas 36) and is the god of love, beauty and poetry. Hazel wood is associated with him as he holds always the hazel wand in his hand. The Irish Druids attributed special virtues to the hazel tree, which was used in magical ceremonies described in Irish texts (Sacred Texts).

One of the striking features of Aengus myth is that it sustains through Irish landscape and nature myth. Aegnus went to the forest to cut a branch of hazel wood; and went about fishing. He caught a silver trout. While he was making fire to cook it on, the trout became a ‘glimmering girl’, who called him by his name and ran away and the rest of the poem gives an account of his wandering in search of the beautiful maid:

Though I am old with wandering,

Though hollow lands and hilly lands,

I will find out where she has gone (44)
He may not rest till he plucks,

The silver apples of the Moon

The golden apples of the sun.

So, apples are symbols of the earthly desires. Yeats thus is of the view that the nature provides him a background to his poetry by which he earns not only experience but also wisdom. No doubt, he is the poet of Irish Sagas in which plants have magical powers.

Celtic people were originally migratory tribes (Thierry Bordas 12) and later they established a civilization of warriors, stockbreeders and merchants. The ancestral ventures of wandering, sailing and hunting are deeply buried in the collective unconscious of Yeats. His poem, “He mourns for the change that has come upon him and his Beloved, and longs for the End of the World” in which there are many hunting symbols. They are transformation symbols of mystic and mythopoeic:

I have been changed to a hound with one red - ear;

I have been in the Path of Stones and the wood of Thorns, (46)

And on his way there appears “a man with a hazel wand” who is none other than Aengus:

He changed me suddenly; I was looking for another way

And now my calling is but the calling of a hound;

And Time and Birth and change are hurrying by.

I would that the Boar without bristles had come

From the west.

And had rooted the sun and moon and stars out of the sky

And lay in the darkness, grunting, and turning to

His rest (47).
By this expression, the beastly world is realized. ‘Path of stones’, ‘Wood of Thorns’, ‘hound’, ‘Hazel wand’, ‘the Boar’ are the different elements that have a symbolic significance. It is “notably the boar and the dog, sacred animals with relation to the hunt, warriors and the hereafter” (Celtic Mythology, 34). Timothy Webb suggests that the boar without bristles is the ancient Celtic image of the darkness, which will at last destroy the world, as it destroys the sun at nightfall in the west (240).

‘The path of stones’ may be referred to the site that was certainly used by the Celts for religious purposes. There were many menhirs, dolmens and raised stones found in Ireland. (Celtic Mythology, 46). Here the cult of stones and woods has considerable importance. They are also possibly associated with the Universe of the night; it was all the more significant and inspired fear (24) as the poet “lay in the darkness, grunting and turning to rest”. And, it is viewed that the ancestral fears supported animist beliefs and favoured the birth of new divinities (24). Indeed, Yeats rather relays on the nature myth that, he believes, would give him strength to resist both contemporary religious and political power over Ireland. Through his poems he is always ready “to rant and rage in flood and wind” (“To Ireland in the Coming Times” 39).

His poem “The Secret Rose” is the narrative of Cuchulain’s love story. Emer was his mortal wife but he fell in love with the beautiful Fand who was the wife of Manannan, God of the sea and navigation. Manannan made use of his cape to separate them and prevented them meeting again. He was also able to calm the waves and unleash storms. (Thierry Bordas 34). “When Cuchulain saw her going, again he became mad after her and wandered among the mountains without food or water, but at last he was cured by a Druid, drink of forgetfulness:
In Druid vapour and make the torches dim;
Till vain frenzy awoke and he died; and him
Who met Fand walking among flaming dew,
By a grey shore where the wind never blew
And lost the world and Emer for a kiss (Secret Rose 50).

As it is pointed out by many critics, The Rose symbolizes both Ireland and Maud Gonne. Yeats might have found himself in the personality of the legendary hero of Cuchulain who was also known for his fighting spirit. ‘A grey shore and ‘deep words’ are not merely the poetic expressions but they are the parts of Irish lands.

“The Valley of the Black Pig” is a small poem of eco-specific and graphically centers round the battle theme. The war imagery strengthens the setting of the poem that marks the ‘Peasant Visionary’:

The dews drop slowly and dreams gather: unknown spears

... Of unknown perishing armies beat about my ears.

We who still labour by the Cromlech on the shore,
The grey cairn on the hill, when day sinks drowned
In dew (The Valley of the Black Pig 49).

The striking symbol of the poem is the ‘Cromlech on the shore’ that represents the cult of Celtic Irish stone henge; it is a prehistoric structure of large flat stones laid horizontally on upright stones, which are considered the places of sacrifice. It was Celtic rite that in memory of great warriors such Cremlechs were erected. Moreover, they were also sacred places.
Timothy Webb, quoting Yeats’ notes on this poem, says that all over Ireland there are prophecies of the coming rout of the enemies of Ireland in a certain Valley of the Black Pig. These prophecies are, now, as they were in the Fenian days, a political force (241) and continues to reflect Yeats’ motif behind the composition of this poem:

A few years before my time, an old man who lived at Lissadell, in Sligo, used to fall down in a fit and rave out descriptions of the Battle; and a man in Sligo has told me that it will be so great a battle that the horses shall go up to their fetlocks in blood, and that their girths, when it is over, will rot from their bellies for lack of a hand to unbuckle them… I suggest that the battle between the Tribes of the goddess Danu, the power of light, and warmth, and fruitfulness, and goodness, and the Fomor, the powers of darkness, and cold, and barrenness, and badness upon the Towery Plain, was the establishment of the habitable world, the rout of the ancestral darkness; that the battle among the Sidhe for the harvest is the annual battle of summer and winter; that the battle among the Sidhe at a man’s death is the battle of life and death; and that the Battle of the Black Pig is the battle between the manifest world and the ancestral darkness at the end of all things; and that all these battles are one, the battle of all things with shadowy decay (241).

It serves more than a commentary on this single piece of poem elaborating the war spirit of both Celtic people and Yeats.

The poems written on ‘Coole’ are widely based on tree and water imagery. “I Walked Among the Seven Woods of Coole” was first published as ‘Introduction to a
Dramatic Poem’ in the Speaker, 1st December 1900; it was an untitled poetic work, dedicated to The Shadowy Waters (1900), from which this text has been taken. This poem is the poetic signature of the Irish land mark, the Coole Park that is in county Galway, owned by Isabella Augustus Gregory (1852-1932) who was the admirer of Yeats’ works. And, Yeats assisted her in her collection of Irish folklore for Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland. Also, in collaboration with Yeats, she played a vital role in managing a national theatre for Ireland. The seven woods were a feature of the estate at Coole Park. The Gaelic element is registered in the names of the places like, Shan-walla, Kyle-dortha, Kyle-na-no, mentioned in the poems. The seven woods at coole later became celebrated in many of his poems. The poem has been composed purely on Irish natural setting bearing “high invisible ones” of Irish tradition. Yeats wonders that the woods, winds and ponds (water) of Irish landscape very well cover “more quiet woods more shining winds and more star-glimmering ponds”. The natural elements like sky, sea and cloud are made characters symbolizing Yeats relationship with his own space.

“Red Hanrahn’s song about Ireland” is again a poem of “patriotic Cathelic Ireland”(Timothy Webb). The poem opens with “the old brown thorn-trees” under which, Yeats says:

Our courage breaks like old trees in a black wind
And dies
....
The wind has thunder on the stones for all that
Maeve can say (59).

Maeve was the Queen of Connaught who was found in the Red Branch cycle of stories and was believed to be buried under the cairn on Knocknarea, a mountain in Sligo. ‘The
exterior of the mountain is’, the Dictionary of Symbol suggests, ‘the abode of the living and “the interior of a mountain has frequently been taken as the location of the Land of the Dead: the derivation of the Celtic and fairy-hills”(210). Thus the nature myth of stone of tree and of water-that provides the poet with ample space to travel through the historical time. And, the places cited in the poem refer to County Sligo. The poet’s spirit of nativity is essentially the core element of the poem.

“September 1913” is the poem written on the recurrent theme of the poet being old witnessing the political and the cultural change. As the poet’s age advances, he observes and says:

For men were born to pray and save:

Romantic Ireland’s dead and gone,

It’s with O’Leary in the grave (73).

The grave is associated with stone imagery and in one way it refers to death but on the other hand it is monumental carrying on with the memories of glorious events and personalities, and thus it persists as an identity of Irish political and artistic past.

Was it for this the Wild geese spread

The grey wing upon every tide

For this that all that blood was shed (73).

Richard Ellmann comments, “The words ‘for this’ and ‘all that blood’ suggest a contrast between the sordid present and a past heroic for the simplicity of its blood sacrifice”(143). The ‘tide’ of time incessantly inscribes those names that have been recorded in the history of Irish struggle for independence. O’Leary (1830-1907) was a Fenian who had been released from penal servitude, much influenced the young Yeats
“through his striking appearance and the generous and literary patriotism of his old age” (Timothy Webb, 252).

The other names mentioned in the poems are Edward Fitzgerald (1763-98), Robert Emmet (1778-1803) and Theobald Wolfe Tone (1763-98); they are the three revolutionaries of Protestant origin who gave their lives for the Irish nationalist cause. As they were buried in the soil of Ireland and became not a mere data of Irish history but a source of inspiration communicating the patriotic fervency to the youth of their nation for ever. Hence, they are historic and ethnic and are historical and mythical. The same tone is heard in “Paudeen” also. The poem begins with a scornful note and a state of anxiety with which the poet comment on ‘the obscure spite of old Paudeen in his shop’ (Paudeen is the diminutive of Patrick). It talks about the change occurred in religion as well as commercial realm of Ireland. The damage caused by St. Patrick has the reference to “the stone Fal”. It is said, the stone of Fal, sometimes called Cromm Cruaich (the curve of the mound) was destroyed by St. Patrick who buried it in the ground with the aid of his cross”. (Thierry Bordas 36). The poet, further, visualizes an expanded landscape:

    ….I stumbled blind

    Among the stones and thorn-trees, under morning light;

    Until a curlew cried (75).

By the expression of Curlew, which is a sand piper that belongs to the largest family of shore birds, Yeats merges the stone and tree images to the water image. The bird is known for its long slender, curved bill, which is used to capture small animals living in the sand or mud. Being unable to resist the challenges and colonial attitude of English over Ireland that now facing the political and religious intruding Yeats at last on the high mountain “thought that … all are in God’s eye/there cannot be, confusion of our sound
forgot/A single soul that lacks a sweet crystalline cry”. Thus, the high mountain is as ever existing stone image, surrounded by the ‘sweet crystalline cry’ of Irish past.

“To a shade” is one of the political poems of Yeats and also speaks of historical and literary changes happened in the later 19th century Ireland. ‘The town’ in the first line of the poem refers to Dublin and “this shade” to the tomb of Charles Stewart Parnell (1846-91), the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, who was buried in Glasnevin Cemetery. He was considered the uncrowned king of Ireland and whose ‘tragically early death was the subject matter of the poem’. The major imageries framed in the poems are expressed as:

To drink of that salt breath out of the sea

When grey gulls flit about instead of men

And/gather the Glasnevin Coverlet.../ you

Had enough of sorrow before death/

… away, away you are safer in the tomb(75).

Irish political history is well presented through the land setting of Glasnevin. The local landmark attracts the reader across the world. It is a residential neighbourhood on the north side of the city of Dublin. It is a main Catholic Cemetery in Ireland and the most historically notable burial place in the country. It is also home to the Irish National Botanic Gardens. It is ironic that Parnell an Anglo-man was buried in the Catholic Irish cemetery. Also, just a huge stone in irregular shape was erected with a plain inscription of PARNELL on it (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/glasnevin_cemetery) and it may be a reason that the poet asks, “I wonder if the builder has been paid”. The cemetery also offers the view of tombs with Celtic Crosses. Yeats has written another poem on Parnell as “Parnell’s Funeral”.

This poem also begins with the ‘tomb’ image and following this Yeats describes how through ‘rich foliage the starlight glittered’ by which a tree image is evolved. And the Phrase, “this quarry down” refers to the fall of Pannell as well as the place where from stones are obtained. The stone image once again metaphorically exposes the solidarity of Yeats’ political will that turns towards tradition and values. Timothy Webb quoting Yeats’ reaction on the impact of Parnell’s fall, says: “the modern literature of Ireland, and indeed all that stir thought which prepared for the Anglo-Irish war, began when Parnell fell from power in 1891. A disillusioned and embittered Ireland turned from parliamentary politics; an event was conceived; and the race began as I [Yeats], to be troubled by that events”[the Rising of 1916](285). Yeats was in a view that “The fall of Parnell” has freed … imagination from practical politics, from agrarian grievance and political enmity, and turned it to imaginative nationalism, to Gaelic, to the ancient stories and at last to lyrical poetry and to Drama (285). Irish leaders like O’Donnell, who is referred as ‘the great comedian’ in the poem, Wolf Tone, Robert Emmet are glorified and their heroic exploits fired the imagination of the people. Yeats reflects that Irish literary scenario could not refrain from the political struggle of the country. The poem does not just give an account of frequent, violent rebellions against England in a plain language but the soul of every dead sacrificed for the country is presented through the symbolic expression of tree image as:

Through Jonathan Swift’s dark grove he passed,
And there plucked bitter wisdom that enriched his blood (189)

Thus, even the nation’s political history has the poetic transformation by such land entity in the hands of Yeats.
“A Memory of Youth” is a love poem, written in memory of Maud Gonne. The moments he spent on his love “passed as at a play” but Yeats uses his poetry as a medium to recollect those sweet memories. So they find an eternal domicile in these lines for the dame as they “sat as silent as a stone”. The poet feels: “A cloud blown from the cut – throat north/suddenly hid Love’s moon away (81). Though they know that “even the best of love must die” he mounts the memory of his love in his heart so that it could be ever living as a stone.

In another love poem, “Men Improve with the Years”, the poet wishes that though he is worn with dreams the memory of his lady love would remain unchanged as the “marble triton among the streams”, triton is the sea-deity in semi human form. In the phrase, “the marble triton among the stream” the elements of stone and sea are merged so as to give the meaning of being solid in the flow of time as his poetry exists beyond time.

“The Tower” is a powerful poem published in 1926. The title can metamorphically be treated on par with stone image. The poet sitting on his tower attempts to explore both his self, as he grows old, and the Irish past. The tower is the old fashioned building, Thoor Ballylee or Ballylee Castle, which he had bought in Galway in 1917. The Castle is also suggestive of Yeats’ racial memory. Commenting on the meaning of Yeats’ gesture in buying and then naming the tower, Edward Larrissy says, it is ‘originally built by Normans… occupied for the most part by their Norman-Gaelic descendants, who formed an important part of the Gaelic order in the middle ages”(57). It is also located near Coole Park, another recurrent landmark, the estate of Lady Gregory. Yeats himself described the old square castle, Ballylee that was surrounded by “a little mill with an old miller, and old ash-trees throwing green shadows upon a little river and great stepping-stones”(Timothy Webb 269).
The central theme of the poem is that the poet was physically becoming weaker every day, while his political as well as personal passions were getting stronger. The poem is in three parts and the first begins with a terrific expression of his unfulfilled wishes that trouble him in his old age. The second part is the longest and most interesting and is a powerful survey, as the poet viewed from the tower, of Irish history, culture and ideals:

I pace upon the battlements and stare

On the foundations of a house, or where

Tree, like a sooty finger, starts from the earth (130).

The ‘Tree’ is a significant image that grows and spreads his branches of memory in him. And, he also remembered “who had lived somewhere upon that rocky place”. Thus, these signs of nature, tree, water and rock, are spatial elements but they serve the poet as time-references to the incidents and persons deeply buried in the mind of the poet. They are the linkers of his time-past and time-present, of his youth and old age. Thus, he makes his soul, though his body seems tired and weaker, so common as these nature elements persist naturally on earth. And, in the poem “Blood and the Moon” he declares, “this tower is my symbol; I declare/ this winding, gyring, spiring treadmill of a stair is my ancestral stair;/ That Goldsmith and the Dean, Berkeley and Burke have traveled there (165).

“Meditation in Time of Civil War” in which the second part, title My House begins thus:

An ancient bridge, and a more ancient tower,

A farmhouse that is sheltered by its wall,

An acre of stony ground,

Where the symbolic rose can break in flower (136).
Yeats considers his tower ‘an ancient bridge’ connecting to his ancestral houses and the rose growing on stony ground, (again the stone symbol and plant symbol are interwoven) solidifies the presence of Irish tradition and culture (the rose symbolizes Ireland). And, from the tower the poet could hear ‘the sound of the rain or sound/of every wind that blows’. It is repeatedly proved that nature and its elements are the strong bases on which Yeats has constructed his poetic and socio-political experiences.

The British imperial vandalism is much focused in his poem, “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen”. Yeats presents a vivid picture of the terrors that have been unleashed upon Ireland and is desperate to see “many ingenious lovely things are gone”. It emerges out of Lady Gregory’s account of the atrocities committed by the Blacks and Tans (the hired mercenaries of the British) at Gort in county Galway. The rebellion of 1916 was put down with an iron hand by the ruling power and there was widespread and blood shed. This inhuman attack on IRA shocked the sensitive poet. He witnesses, “All break and vanish, and evil gathers head”. Yet, he not seems to be hopeful to say, “now wind drops, dust settles; thereupon/There lurches past; bearing a striking note that wind would drop rain to bring out the new life from the new soil formed of the settling dust.

Once again in this poem also Yeats asserts with the tool of nature myth of water and soil that his Irish past would take new lease of life, continuity through present though his nation is afflicted with political, cultural and religious invasions. However, the poet tries to philosophize life by accepting the changes that whatever happens or comes to him and as he says in his poem ‘A Dialogue of Self and Soul’, from his collection *The Winding Stair*: “I think of that my tongue is a stone”. Here the stone is personified articulating the past that exists beyond time. Yeats believes that art and literature can transcend the boundaries of time and space. With this same voice he writes in a quatrain:
Through the great song return no more

There’s keen delight in what we have:

The rattle of pebbles on the shore

Under the receding wave (The Nineteenth Century and After 167).

‘Pebbles under the receding wave, is recurrent imagery that has been framed out of the figures of stone and water.

“Coole Park, 1929” bears Yeats sign mark and is no less important than his tower. This place makes him travel in the memory lines of the intellectual sweetness “that cut through time or cross it withershins”, (meaning moving backward) and this is the place where most of the mythical, oral, legendary, literary and political sources of Ireland got shaped in the hands of Yeats and his companions like lady Gregory, Synge. He seems to visualize in the poem, “nettles wave upon a shapeless mound/And saplings root among the broken stone” (Coole Park, 1929 170) and he could relish “all the sensuality of shade” then he calls the place “A moment’s memory to that laurelled head”. The same poetic memories are recorded in another poem, Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931. As the Coole Park is close to his tower, he can amazingly transcribe the nature’s setting into this poem:

Under my window-ledge the waters race

…

Run underground, rise in a rocky place
In Coole demesne, and there to finish up Spread to a lake and drop into a hole.
What’s water but the generated soul?

He feels that his soul becomes one with his own soil abounding in water, trees, rocks and stones.
Yeats was personally attracted towards stones imagery in various forms, natural as well as sculptural. The poems he has written, ‘The Statues’, ‘Bronze head’, ‘Tombs’, ‘Under Ben Bulben’, ‘Meru’, ‘Lapis Lazuli’ etc. are a few samples that can well prove his poetic attitude towards these elements.

The poem “Lapis Lazuli”, from the collections of his last poem draws the attention of many critics as it is a kind of precious blue stone. The Lapis Lazuli referred to in this poem belonged to Yeats. As the poet himself writes about this in a letter to Dorathy Wellesley, some one had, “sent me a present of a great piece carved by some Chinese sculptor into a semblance of a mountain, with temple, trees, pats and an ascetic and pupil about to climb the mountain”.

The poem begins with an account of the war-phobia and panic that swept across Europe during the years 1935-1939. The circle of terror and violence was widening, and people were waiting for air - raids, ‘bomb-balls’ with horror in their hearts. It was generally felt that the fine arts like poetry, painting and music are of no use in such war crisis. But the poet is of strong opinion that there is no need to despair. The process of history is a cyclic one, and what has been must be once again. So, Yeats tries to reveal the truth that birth, death, rebirth, destruction and reconstruction, is the eternal law of nature:

   Every discoloration of the stone,
   Every accidental crack or dent,
   Seems a water - course…(198).

Thus, it is art that revives and keeps up his enthusiasm for life in tragic times and even in his old age he is able to romanticize his past. He does not fancy his past in any alien land or world but gripping his foot on his own soil, true to his land and tradition, he derives his poetic spirit from his native Celtic myths, fairy tales, folk lore, legends and history that
are all embedded in Irish landscape. As F.A.C Wilson observes that his poetry is of his subjective tradition, which can also include the landscape tradition. From his early poems to last poems Yeats’ works are marked with this landscape tradition. The next chapter examines how far this three-tier symbol of water, tree and stone are relocated in the select poems of Seamus Heaney.
Chapter 3

Notes and References

Books and Nonperiodical Publications


