W.B. Yeats: the versatile personality of 20th Century English Literature

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Abstract:

William Butler Yeats is the greatest poet and the link between the nineteenth and the twentieth century in the field of English literature. He is a versatile personality: a lyric poet, a mystic, a mythologist, and a romantic. He is a poet with a political ideology (to a very limited extent); he is a poet with a prophetic vision and occult philosophy; and he is also a poet with experience in experiments in dramaturgy. He was the national poet of the Republic of Ireland. Yeats was a great Irish poet, dramatist and leader in the Irish literary revival at the end of the preceding century. In the beginning he attempted romantic poetry, but later on he had leanings towards realistic literature. In his poems there is preponderance of strange symbols and images and also occultism. His poetic dramas include “The Land of Heart’s Desire”, ‘Deidre’ and the poetic collections are ‘The Wild Swans at Coolie’, ‘The Tower’ and ‘The Winding Stair’. **The present paper is an honest attempt to attract the attention of the readers and lovers of English literature towards the importance and the simplicity of language of W.B. Yeats who was the versatile personality of 20th Century English Literature.**

Kew-words: greatest, link, versatile personality, poet, a mystic, mythologist, political ideology, towards realistic literature.

Introduction:

Yeats was one of the major poets of the 20th Century. “He was a dreamer and visionary, who was fascinated by folk-lore, ballad, and the superstitions of the Irish peasantry”. In order to fully appreciate his verse, one is expected to be well conversant with the Irish social back ground and mythology. He had a peculiar way of thinking in respect of human life which is well illustrated in his significant work ‘A Vision’.

In the Malazan world the dominant races have inhabited the planet since the dawn of time and are more powerful than humans. This hints at a reality because humans have appeared on the face of the earth comparatively a few millenniums ago and still claims themselves to be the rulers of the planet. The earth has seen dinosaurs that were a powerful species that was swiped off the planet way before the arrival of humans. These dinosaurs are fittingly comparable to the K’Chain Che’Malle species presented in the Malazan world. The K’Chain Che’Malle is assumed to be extinct by the Malzans but they were proved wrong. A few of them continued to exist and killed humans in the Malazan wars. In the real world there are animals that are more powerful than human beings but they do not have language and logic to win over them. There is an infinite variety of beings dwelling on this planet of which human
beings are just one species. Nonetheless, they tend to be the rulers of the planet and exploit the resources imprudently. It is this equation that the Malazan world contests and challenges.

Although human beings are shown as creatures who exploit the world and its resources for their selfish needs, their positive side is also portrayed in the series. They have been fighters and survivors since their naissance in this world. They have heroically survived all the harsh circumstances and have done their bit to make this planet a better place to live. This compassionate side of humanity is also shown in the Malazan world and can be witnessed where Quick Ben and Adjunct Tavore march through severe conditions to save Goddess Burn. The Malazan world is formed upon the dreams of Goddess Burn rather than any scientific or logical explanation. The world goes in stark danger when the goddess starts suffering from the poison of the Crippled God. The chaining of the Crippled God by the Elder Gods led to the spreading of venom in the body of Burn, the Sleeping Goddess, that in turn leads to her being poisoned resulting in her ill health. If the world is the dreams of Goddess Burn then the Goddess must stay healthy to be able to have dreams. Quick Ben follows Adjunct Tavore to fight a war that leads to the liberation of the Crippled God and later his reunion with his heart. The Crippled God who had been a figure of malediction throughout the series emerges as a pathetic creature who survives in a wretched state for centuries. This forms a pitiable account as a situation is displayed in which a God had been misinterpreted for ages by one and all. The God, who once might have been despicable, undergoes a transformation that makes him a doleful being.

Objectives:

The main objective of the present paper is to attract the attention of the readers towards the poetic art of W.B. Yeats who is the versatile personality of 20th Century English Literature.

Simple and Passionate:

The ‘horror-stricken’ poem, ‘Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen’ arose out of Lady Gregory’s account of the atrocities committed by the Blacks and Tans in different parts of Ireland. These mercenary soldiers of British government were deployed to crush the Irish rebellion in 1916 and their cruelty surpassed even all heart-breaking cruelties. Lady Gregory Writes: “The Blacks and Tans and the Auxiliaries were recklessly used to frighten Ireland into submission to law and order.” The movements of the hired soldiers were terror oriented. Yeats writes:

‘Now days are dragon-ridden, the nightmare,

Rides upon sleep: a drunken soldiery

can leave the mother, murdered at her door,

To crawl in her own blood, and go scot-free:’

Such a miserable condition of the Irish people moved the poet’s heart. In that intense feeling Yeats is carried out of himself as he observes moral values getting degenerated, the social institutions and great art things were being shattered to pieces. He laments over the lost peace and lost hope in this poem. Unterecker says: “His object is to see destruction accurately to record precisely the civil war and the larger international destruction that it foreshadows.”
At the beginning of the poem, Yeats emphasizes that ‘Lovely things’ are assured no survival even though they are apparently protected from the last phase of the moon:

*Many ingenious lovely things are gone*

*That seemed sheer miracle to the multitude,*

*Protected from the circle of the moon*

*That pitches common things about.*

Though “ingenious lovely things are sheer miracle to the people of Athens, the marvels of Athens have disappeared. Not a single work of Phidias (the superb master of Greek art and culture, a famous sculptor who lived during 500-432 B.C.) remains in spite of the fact that his statues were regarded as the greatest sculpture of ancient times. The ancient image made from imperishable olive tree at Colonus and famous ivory works of art of Phidias are made to pass away like grasshoppers and bees, it displays the elegiac tone which is driven and controlled by moral indignation. Yeats claims it ‘not philosophical but simple and passionate lamentation over lost peace and lost hope.’

In 1919, the war was just over but in Ireland the things were far from being peaceful. Yeats sets out to analyze the decay of tradition. Prof. Stock observes: “Yeat seems to be realizing in his nerves the things that brain and imagination had grasped already, and understanding deepens the terror at the same time that it just manage control it.” The present state of Ireland he is reading the defeat of two thousand years of human endeavor. The course of history runs in cycles and our civilization must meet its doom. However, a strong public opinion has been mobilized to buttress our institutions. But all dream and delusion our customs, laws, traditions and better than toys that do not last long. The Doomsday seems to be at hand. Philosophy or any other wise counsel is of no use because we have degraded to the category of beasts like weasels fighting in the hole. We are sure to meet the fate which overtook Babylon, Egypt and Athens. And, it is no consolation, but a bleak fact, that the human spirit will survive it.

**A vivid picture:**

Yeats presents a vivid picture of what he desires and why he has come to Byzantium to assume the shape of a golden bird. He writes: ‘I speak of a bird made by Grecian goldsmith. There is a record of tree of gold with artificial birds which sang. The tree was somewhere in the Royal Palace of Byzantium. I use it as a symbol of the intellectual joy of eternity, as contrasted with the instinctive joy of human life.’ This note explains the poet’s philosophy to acquire supernatural wisdom when physical limbs begin to lose vitality. As a work of art, man is not subjected to ravages of time. In short, the poet prays to the saints to grant him an eternity such as is enjoyed by the Byzantium art. The reference to the theory of transmigration of souls also becomes a point of discussion among the readers.

The poem ‘**Lapis Lazuli**’ was written on 25th July, 1936. It was published in Yeats’s ‘Last Poems’ (1936-39). It was composed shortly after the poet received a gift of a large piece of lapis lazuli (a semiprecious stone of a light blue colour, used in ornamental and mosaic work.) Yeats had received a lapis lazuli medallion, with a carving on it, from a man called Harry Clifton. It was carved by some Chinese sculptor into the semblance of a mountain with
temple, tree, paths, and an ascetic and pupil about to climb the mountain. He began to think about its significance and wrote to Dorothy Wellesley: “Ascetic, pupil, hard stone, eternal theme of the sensual east, the heroic cry in the midst of despair; but no, I am wrong, the East has its solutions always and therefore knows nothing of tragedy. It is we, not the East, that must raise the heroic cry.” With this thought Yeats views the problem of restlessness, the destruction of civilization in the West which may be impending. It is observed that, “only one poem, ‘Lapis Lazuli’, confronts Asia and Europe without representing them at odds with one another.”

Summing Up:

To sum up, the research scholar comes to the point that Yeats was greatly influenced by Indian philosophy and occultism. French symbolism also played a great role in the poetic development of his literary career, and the names of Symons and Mallarme can be significantly referred to in this context. Two women, Maud Gonne and Lady Augusta Gregory, came in his life and they moulded his genius towards artistic perfection. Maud Gonne was the daughter of Anglo-Irish colonel but he could not win her love finally for the marriage. Lady Gregory was a middle-aged widow of a landlord of Western Ireland who extended him considerable monetary help and made him. Almost independent she proved to be an ideal patron in the cause of the protection of art and poetry.

Yeats was a great Irish poet, dramatist and leader in the Irish literary revival at the end of the preceding century. In the beginning he attempted romantic poetry, but later on he had leanings towards realistic literature. In his poems; there is preponderance of strange symbols and images and also occultism. His poetic dramas include “The Land of Heart’s Desire’ and ‘Deidre’ and the poetic collections are ‘The Wild Swans at Coolie’ and ‘The Tower’ and ‘The Winding Stair’.

Yeats was one of the major poets of the 20th Century. “He was a dreamer and visionary, who was fascinated by folk-lore, ballad, and the superstitions of the Irish peasantry”. In order to fully appreciate his verse, one is expected to be well conversant with the Irish social back ground and mythology. He had a peculiar way of thinking in respect of human life which is well illustrated in his significant work ‘A Vision’.

In this paper; the research scholar writes that W.B.Yeats is one of the greatest poets of the Romantic Age. The research scholar tries to prove that W.B.Yeats is undoubtedly regarded as the versatile personality of 20th Century English Literature.

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