

# **Mythology in W. B. Yeats's Early Poetry**

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## **Abstract**

Because Irish myth and folklore had been suppressed by church doctrine and British control of school system, W.B. Yeats used his poetry as a tool for re-educating the Irish population about their heritage and as a strategy for developing Irish nationalism. Thus the participation of Yeats in the Irish political system had its origins in his interest in Irish myth and folklore.

Yeats retold entire folktales in epic poems and plays and used fragments of stories in shorter poems. Moreover, he presented poems which deal with subjects, images, and themes called from folklore. Most important, Yeats infused his poetry with a rich sense of Irish culture. Even poems that do not deal explicitly with subjects from myth retain powerful tinges of indigenous Irish culture. Yeats often borrowed word selection, verse form, and patterns of imagery directly from traditional Irish myth and folklore.

## **Introduction**

Often, the poetry and plays of W.B. Yeats take its subject matter from traditional Celtic folklore and myth. Myths are

reflections of profound reality and they, dramatically, represent our instinctive understanding. Moreover, myths are collective to and communal, and they had sense of wholeness and togetherness to social life.<sup>(1)</sup> Yeats endeavored by incorporating into his work the stories and characters of Celtic origin, to encapsulate something of the national character of his beloved Ireland. The authors' own sense of nationalism as well as the overriding personal interest in mythology and the oral traditions and folklore were the reasons and motivations his use of Celtic themes. Books with titles such as *Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms and Superstitions of Ireland, The Fireside Stories of Ireland, History of Ireland, Cuculain and the Contemporaries, Irish Folklore* and many others were of great help to the young Yeats.<sup>(2)</sup> He asserted, by 1889, that " [I had] worked my way through most, if not all, recorded Irish folktales"<sup>(3)</sup>. By this time, he had written an introduction for and edited, *Irish Fairy and Folk Tales* . By immersing himself in the rich and varied world of Celtic myth and folklore, Yeats would contribute to this literary world of poems and plays that embrace his native legends while promoting his own sense of nationalism.

"The Song of Wandering Aengus" is a poem that shows how Yeats melds folklore and nationalism. In this poem, he refers to Aengus, the Irish god of love. He is a young, handsome god that had four birds flying about his head. The birds symbolized kisses and inspired love in all who heard them sing. Part of the story is that, at one point, Aengus was troubled by the dream of a young maiden. A woman that is everything his heart desires and he quickly falls in love with her and becomes love sick upon waking. Then, he began searching all of Ireland for the young woman in his dreams. Also, he tells his mother and she searches the whole of Ireland for the maiden, but after a year, she still had not found the woman. Then Aengus called his father in to help search for the woman. After a year of searching, his father

could not find her. Finally, a king and a friend of Aengus's father was called to search for her. After a year, he found the elusive young maiden.

In this poem, Yeats strays from the actual myth of Aengus. He wrote: "Though I am old with wandering/ Through hollow lands and hilly lands."<sup>(4)</sup> In the original myth Yeats was still young when he found his love. The poem was about longing and searching, rather than about a subject of song of found love.

The subject matter of the poem alone helps illustrate Yeats's profound sense of nationalism. Yeats's choice of Celtic god over the more traditional use of Greek or Roman gods in poetry was to elevate Irish mythology in the world of literature. Many of Yeats's early works share the common theme of Celtic folklore and myth. As the poet continued in this manner, it becomes clear to the reader that the thematic elements of the work become most focused. Then the poet moved towards a distinctly Irish sensibility with regard to love of country and this can be seen in his work. In "To Ireland in the Coming Times" Yeats again draws upon Irish folklore and mythic symbols and sets them against a backdrop of national identity. When Yeats writes, "When Time began to rant and rage/The measure of her flying feet/Made Irelands' heart began to beat;"<sup>(5)</sup> he is speaking of the affects of the industrial revolution, "When Time began to rant and rage."<sup>(6)</sup> How the pre-industrial rhythm of life had been interrupted by the hourly wage in the cities, as opposed to the pastoral life of the country that was governed by the changing of the seasons, rather than the movement of the hands of a clock. This accelerated pace of life and of time, "The measure of her flying feet,"<sup>(7)</sup> was reviled by Yeats and he wrote of his distaste of current English life, referring to passions that a man might yet find in Ireland, "Love of the unseen life and love of the country."<sup>(8)</sup> The incompatible pace of modern life in

England did not connect with Irish patterns of living and so, "Made Irelands' heart began to beat;" here Yeats is writing of the awaking of an Irish literary tradition. This sentiment is touched upon again farther along the poem, though this time Yeats brings Celtic imagery into it,

Yet he who treads in measured ways  
May surely barter gaze for gaze  
Man ever journeys on with them  
After the red-rose-bordered hem  
Ah, faeries, dancing under the moon,  
A Druid land, a Druid tune!<sup>(9)</sup>

These lines restate the "measured" way of life in England, its obsession with commerce, "barter gaze for gaze" and how the English way of life has spread beyond its borders, "Man journeys on with them" .Yeats then emphasizes Irish imagery; the rose, the faeries and the Druid that are all closely associated with Ireland and are used here to disparage the rigid and structure English world view.

In order to create a conspicuously Irish literature, Yeats will take inspiration from the myths and legends of ancient Ireland. Cuchulain, as a character, appears many times throughout Yeats's work, this legend predated back to the arrival of Christianity to the Island. Cuchulain is a character that appears in the Ulster Cycle of stories and he, much like Hercules or Achilles of the Greeks, was a superhuman warrior. Cuchulains' birth was considered divine in origin, having supernatural father-figures, such as: Conall, Cernach and Fergus who raised him intermittently as did the king of Ulster, Conchobars'. As a youth, he defeated one hundred and fifty of king Conchobars' troops on his way to the royal court. Arriving at the royal court of king

Conchobar, the young Cuchulain demands weaponry and then proceeds to break fifteen sets of weapons given to him. Special magically strengthened arms had to be made withstand Cuchulain's godlike might. His prowess on the field of battle is legendary and is said to have overcome an entire army sent to dispose him by entering into a supernatural berserk frenzy or 'warp spasm'. When frenzied, Cuchulain cannot make a distinction between friend and foe and some of his allies are victims of his battle madness.<sup>(10)</sup>

Most important to Yeats' work is the relationship between Conchobar and Cuchulain. According to the legend, Cuchulain swears an oath of the loyalty to the king, and the king then sets Cuchulain against his own son, Conla, believing him to be a threat to the kingdom. Cuchulain kills his son in combat because he is bound by his allegiance to the king. After the tragic deed is done, Cuchulain, mad with grief, rushes into the ocean and begins to slash at the waves with his sword. Yeats's "Cuchulain Fight with the Sea" describes this in verse,

Cuchulain stirred,  
Stared on the horses of the sea, and heard  
The cars of battle and his and own name cried,  
And fought with the invulnerable tide.<sup>(11)</sup>

An ironic tone is felt here, considering the hero as virtually invulnerable. This story is also told in the form of the play, "On Bails' Strand" which was performed by the players of the Abbey Theater.

The Cycle of Ulster, a collection of myths that recounts the conflict between Conchobar of Ulster and Medb of Connacht, has Cuchulain fighting on the side of Ulster, for king Conchobar. The armies of Ulster are weakened by a curse put upon them by Macha, a goddess with three aspects. As a woman, Macha, was

forced to compete in a footrace against horses, even though pregnant at the time. She wins the race, promptly gives birth to twins and before passing away places a curse upon the men of Ulster that they will be weak in the times of greatest danger. All are weakened except for Cuchulain, who fights the forces of Connact single-handedly.<sup>(12)</sup>

The demise of the hero is foreshadowed by a series of events that are magically forbidden for the hero to engage in. Because of circumstances, the hero is forced to break this magic code of behavior, one after another, until it weakens him, making him vulnerable. Eventually Medb through treachery, sorcery and the entirety of every armed man in Ireland is able to lure Cuchulain to his death by a spear forged by Vulcan himself. Mortally wounded, he bids himself to a pillar stone with cloth so that he may die on his feet. It is only after Morrigh had the shape-shifting war goddess, and her sisters appear as crows and perch upon Cuchulain's shoulder that any of the combatants dare approach the dying hero to finish him off.<sup>(13)</sup> There are many other stories that recount the deeds of this Irish hero. It is sufficient to say that Cuchulain is the hero most identified with Ireland and represents both positive and negative aspects of the Irish people and their struggle.

Much later in his career, Yeats would revisit the folkloric themes that were so pervasive in his early work with the poem "Cuchulain Comforted". In this poem, the poet describes the death of the Irish hero: "He leant upon a tree /As though to meditate on wounds and blood."<sup>(14)</sup> Here the tree has replaced the pillar stone of the myth. The author then writes, "A shroud that seemed to have authority/ Among those bird-like things came, and let fall/ A bundle of linen. Shrouds by two and three".<sup>(15)</sup> The burial garment is appropriate to the scene of a dying man, but a "shroud that seemed to have authority" seems to be imposing its will upon the fallen hero. If Cuchulain represents Ireland in this

poem, then the bearer of the shroud (morrighan in legend) or the shroud itself might be indicative of malevolent forces within Ireland that prevent progress and put heroic ideals to death. Often, in Irish history, have those who fought an independent free Ireland been undone, not by the English, but by a lack of solidarity from within. Yeats once said of Celtic plays, "They would be far more effective than lectures and might do more than anything else we can do to make the Irish, Scottish, and often other Celts recognize their solidarity."<sup>(16)</sup>

The verse in "Cuchulain Comforted", continues,  
 'Now must we sing and sing the best we can,  
 But first you must be told our character;  
 Convicted cowards all, by kindred slain  
 'Or driven from home and left to die in fear.'  
 They sang, but had nor human tunes nor words,  
 Though all was done in common as before,  
 They had changed their throat of birds.<sup>(17)</sup>

Yeats will often make reference to song in his writing, and often had singing in his plays. This recurrent motif in his work is related to folklore in the sense that folklore is an oral tradition passed down through the generations. Yeats, when speaking of difference between Irish and English literature had this to say, "Irish poetry and Irish stories were made to be spoken or sung, while English literature has all but completely shaped itself in the printing press."<sup>(18)</sup> When the poet writes, "Though all was done in common as before, /They had changed their throats and had the throats of birds;" this line speaks to the oral tradition of folklore. In the retelling of the same stories overtime, certain parts of the mythical story is altered depending upon the teller, though the overall structure of the story would remain. Yeats recognizes this and spoke of Irish legend as "...ever changing ever the same".<sup>(19)</sup>

Stories and characters from The Ulster Cycle also appear in the dramatic plays of Yeats and here the intention of the artist in producing Celtic work is abundantly clear. It is well known that the foundation of The Abbey Theatre where the work was performed, were built upon the belief that a Great Irish would have the power to move Irish audiences because what was playing out upon the stage would resonate with their heritage and they would be more inclined to be identified with the characters and stories. Yeats states that, "One should love best what is nearest and most interwoven with one's life"<sup>(20)</sup>. Further, Yeats then remarked, "One wants to write for one's own people, who come to the playhouse with knowledge of one's subjects and with hearts ready to be moved."<sup>(21)</sup> By applying a new approach to an old form, Yeats' innovation was his use of the mythic stories and characters from Ireland's past and presenting them on stage.

Yeats presented plays that relied heavily upon the myth and legends of ancient Ireland, among them; "On Baile's Strand", "Deirde", and "The Death of Cuchulain". Though Yeats' plays deviate from the source material throughout, the core of the plays remain true to their origins. One reason for Yeats' invoking an artist's license with certain scenes is that there are practical limitations with what can be done on stage. Another reason for Yeats's re-imagining these myths is that it would often serve to enhance the dramatic effect of the story. For example, in the play "Deirde" the queen commits suicide at the end of the play by using a knife that she has secreted away. In the myth it is told that Deirde stays with king Conchobar, the man slew her lover, for an entire year before committing suicide by flying herself from a moving chariot, shattering her head against stone.<sup>(22)</sup> It is clear why Yeats chose one over the other, for as dramatic as Deirde's death is in the myth, on stage it would not have played as well. What Yeats did preserve, however, are the characters' motivations and relationships that drive the narrative forward and



create a sense of drama and often, tragedy. Yeats would say: "All folk literature has indeed a passion whose like is not in modern literature and music and art, except where it has come by straight or crooked way out of ancient times."<sup>(23)</sup>

The folklore, myth and legends of ancient Celtic traditions gave Yeats a rich well of inspiration to draw from. By not falling into the drip of overly romanticizing his work, as many other authors of the time would do, Yeats was able to help begin a tradition of another sort, the Irish literary tradition. By placing importance on the Irish culture in his work, Yeats fulfilled his own sense of national pride to the delight of his readers and audiences and to challenge many of his English contemporaries who felt that nothing value or worthy of study could come out of Ireland.

"The Wanderings of Oisín" is Yeats's longest poem and it is a very dense mythological one. It is based on the lyrics of the Fenian Cycle of Irish mythology, and displays the influence of both Sir Samuel Ferguson and the pre-Raphaelite poets. The poem took two years to be completed, and was one of the few works from this early period that he did not disown in his maturity. Oisín introduces what was to become one of his most important themes; the appeal of the life of contemplation over the life of education.<sup>(24)</sup> The myth of Oisín is a tale about man who returns to his homeland after living 300 years in an eternal fairy paradise, providing generous insight into the history, experience, and mindset of settled traveler John Reilly and his family.

The poem opens with a dialogue between Christianity and poetic myth, St. Patrick and Oisín, in which the representative of purely poetic myth is in the sadness of outrageous old age. As Oisín tells his story to St. Patrick, he is captured again by its spell, and his would be converter is reduced to lamenting: "You are still wrecked among heathen dreams." The heathen dreams of Oisín's first voyage take him to a land of youth, poetry, and love,

where death appears to be unknown. But, to get there, Oisín "rode out from the human lands" with his temptress Niamh, whose name, symbolizes, to Yeats, "brightness and beauty." As the two lovers ride out, they see images "of the immortal desires of immortals," images of unfulfilled and unfulfillable desires.

In the land of youthful dancers and lovers to which Oisín come, the song of human joy is heard by immortals as sadness. The songs of immortal joy are antinomian, and in that passion which is unholy, Oisín lives for a hundred years until he is recalled to human matters by a part of a warrior's broken lance, washed ashore on the island of immortals. And the first book ends with a magnificent chart of immortals prophesying the exhausted age that must come to a returned Oisín. The emblems of a mere natural fulfillment that await Oisín are the birds who murmur at the injustice of mutability, the mouse whose speed is only a weariness as the race into time destroys, and the fisher king turning into a ball of dust. But the immortals will abide in their youthful love until when the stars will drop, and a pale rose of the moon will wither away. Primary decay awaits Oisín, but the destruction of the immortals can come only when the forms of nature dissolve. The warning is the stronger for its dark paradox; to choose nature is to be survived by nature, for the human cannot outlast the natural, but to choose the inhuman is to transcend nature, and yet to live as long as nature lives.<sup>(25)</sup>

This dilemma becomes more intense in Book II. The emblems of ungratified desires, "youth and lands and the deer and the hounds," come by again, and Oisín Niamh take up their journey, until they reach an island temple. This temple is demon, haunted, and the dusky demon is himself a protean singer, celebrant of a sand revelry, for his eyes are like the wings of kingfishers' emblems of the dust that is nature's. In the fight with Oisín, the demon assumes varied natural shapes, and appears to die at sunset. But he rises on the forth morn, beginning a new

natural cycle, and fights Oisín until he is overcome at another sunset. Such rhythm of recurrence goes on for a hundred years, with three days of feasting alternating with one of fighting. What Oisín fights, stays, and yet must face perpetually again is his own double, the natural man or soul in him that will not finally die, but that also cannot finally overcome him. A beach-bough is borne to Oisín, emblematic of his last days, and the Island of Victories must be abandoned as the island of Dancing was. Oisín leaves a cyclic world, in which a frustrate victory yet induced no frustration, in order to get back toward a cyclic world in which no victories over nature are to be won, and yet a perennial frustration is induced.<sup>(26)</sup>

In Book III, the guest leads to the Island of Sleepers as it must, for the flight from nature and towards a perpetual gratification of desires dooms the searcher identity sleep and poetry. As the lovers journey again, the familiar tableaux of "those that fled, and that followed" pass them, but now Oisín and Niamh recognize, with a sigh, the meaning of the visions. As the second stanza of Book III makes clear the guest is now haunted by nostalgia for the human world, and an end to illusion (and to love and poetry) approaches. It comes in the darkness of an Island inhabited by "a monstrous slumbering fold," titans who have put aside their arms and their trophies, titans who are men and birds, unnatural representatives of an ironic naturalization of the human which is yet poetry. The bell branch "sleep's forebear," appears again, an emblem now of "inhuman sleep" that has come to these monster's who, however, are more beautiful than men. Oisín makes one heroic effort to rouse the sleepers, but his efforts leads only to his own yielding to the bell-branch, and he and Niamh sleep for a century, which he dreams of the human life he abandoned in his quest for a poet's world.<sup>(27)</sup>

Awakened by the fall of a starling, and so startled by nature out of his profound, unnatural slumber, Oisín feels again "the

ancient sadness of man" and abandons Niamh warned by her against even one touch of the earth, Oisín nevertheless, returns to the human and the natural, and to times' revenge's. For he returns to a Christianized Ireland, to humans bowed down by consciousness of natural sin and defect and he falls, weak and exhausted, into the world of St. Patrick. Though the poem ends with Oisín's defiant vow to descend to Hell from the company of his brothers, it ends also in passionate defeat, for the quest has been self-destructive. What Oisín has failed to learn is :a quest to thwart nature's limitations must seek out an object that itself shatters nature's value as well as context; the young Oisín had sought in a super-nature what only the imagination can give, and even then only with equivocation.<sup>(28)</sup>

Yet Oisín is a hero, and his failed quest is Yeats's own. In the Anglo-Irish myth of the hero, Yeats had chosen to find a model for what he hoped would be a new kind of antithetical quester, Yeats embraces the quest's natural defeat as a victory of a man divided against himself , natural against the imaginative neither capable of final victory over the other.

Yeats sought in his writing to create fresh tradition and a unique style. He attempted to create a literature that was Irish in subject matter and tone. Yeats strove to reawaken in his people a sense of the glory and significance of Ireland's historical and legendary past.<sup>(29)</sup> According to Yeats, the vehicle to accomplish this was only through Irish mythology; and he found a treasury of symbols hitherto unused in English poetry. Turning mythical figures into private symbols was the vehicle by which Yeats sought to translate his life to mythical events represented by the symbols of Irish mythology. The very fact that the young man could so easily connect a new Religion for himself out of Irish folklore, and anything that can hardly-is evidence of a rather unreligious nature; evidence of blithe and irresponsible

temperament, that of a young man sure of his genius, and unconvicted of sin.

Many of Yeats's techniques that used in his early work have played in his "To the Rose Upon the Road of Time" particularly is his use of myth and folklore. Also this poem explains to some extent his preoccupation with the spiritual and mystical world. The poem is about a narrator (presumably Yeats himself, as most of his work of this type is written from his point of view, rather than actional characters') and his disdain for contemporary life, resulting in his wistful longing to be part of the Irish legends, to be something more than common man.<sup>(30)</sup>

Yeats uses the red rose to represent the mythological Ireland, beginning the poem with: "Red rose, proud rose, sad Rose of all my days!"<sup>(31)</sup>. The Rose here represents Ireland, but it could also be seen as Maud Gonne, Yeats's always unrequited love. Yeats' story with Maud Goone runs parallels with his relationship with the mythical worlds as described here; which is beyond his grasp. The similarity is emphasized by the somewhat foreboding atmosphere of the first stanza, and the beginning of the second:

Come near, come near, come near-Ah, leave me still  
A little space for the rose-breath to all.<sup>(32)</sup>

While Yeats belongs to be part of this world, he has no delusions about it; he can see that it is without its own dangers and the things are not entirely perfect about it-the same applies to Maud Gonne, who could be very violent and fanatical person, being embroidered as she was in the volatile Irish politics of the day.

Yeats leaps straight into the mythological elements of the poem referring to Irish stories. Curiously, these stories are rather depressing and negative in their influence. By using phrases and

words such as "the bitter tide:", "thine own sadness," and "grown old" Yeats does little to endear to us this world about which he is so enthusiastically writing. It is brief expedition into Irish lore ends on a decidedly melancholy note, referring to "lovely melody" perhaps the Irish songs that encapsulate the old stories.<sup>(33)</sup> This part of the poem serves to show us the magic of this other world, and also portrays its potential for destruction and pain. The stanza ends unexpectedly; after the negative aspects of the spiritual world have seemingly been described, Yeats writes that he will end there: "Eternal beauty wandering on her way."<sup>(34)</sup>

Again, this is reference to both the spiritual world and Maud Gonne, both of which, to Yeats, embody "Eternal beauty" despite having many hidden perils. He claims that this perfect vision can only be seen if it is not obscured by "mans' fate." This can be interpreted in a number of ways. It was a reference to mans' ultimate fate, which is to die, or it could be more to do with mans' tendency to fall (" hopes that toil and pass") and lack certain qualities that Yeats thought important; man does not have Yeats's insight into the spiritual world, for a start. This is where the main theme and concern of the poem is first properly stated. Yeats wants to be above the normal trappings of everyday life, he wants to transcend normal life and move towards apotheosis of a kind.<sup>(35)</sup>

The narrative of the poem takes a cautious pause at the beginning of the stanza, as the narrator brings his passion under control and remembers the dangers that are associated with his obsession. The structure of the second stanza is very similar to that of the first, but in opposing fashion. Where as the first longed for the spiritual world and went on to describe it, the second begins with a wish to keep a hold on reality, so as not to lose the mortal worlds' various idiosyncrasies:

The weak worm hiding down in its small cave,  
The field-mouse running by me in the grass'  
And heavy mortal hopes that toil and pass;<sup>(36)</sup>

The last line expresses Yeats' fundamental view of the real world to the unreal one; that is one of failure and pain, where his hopes never realized but only linger then die-again an oblique reference to his feelings towards Maud Gonne. Yeats then returns once more to his wish to join the spiritual world:

But seek alone to hear the strange things said  
By God to the bright hearts of those long dead,  
And learn to chaunt a tongue men do not know.<sup>(37)</sup>

However much he wishes for the rose to come near, it can only ever be a wish-another "heavy mortal hope." That cannot be realized. All that happens is that he keeps returning to the beginning, hoping over and over again for his fortunes to change and his dreams to come true; the Maude Gonne's influence in the poem is once again prevalent.<sup>(38)</sup>

"Who Goes With Fergus" is a short poem of Yeats full of complexity and mystery. In it Yeats asks who will follow Fergus' example and leave the Cares of the world to know the wisdom of nature. His exhortation is that young men and women alike to leave loves' bitter mystery and to turn instead to the mysterious order of nature, over which Fergus rules.

On one level, the poem represents Yeats's exhortation to the young men and women of his day to give over their political and emotional struggle in exchange for a struggle with the lasting mysteries of nature. Yeats's suggestion is that Fergus was brave and wise to give up his political ambition in exchange for the wisdom of the Druids, and such sacrifice was complicated. For he did not find a life of frolic and happiness with the Druids (the Druids were the healers and priests of the ancient societies or the

Celts who were a group who inhabited Ireland long before the Norman or British invasions.) But he did find knowledge, wisdom and perspectives too much, indeed.<sup>(39)</sup>

On a second level, the poem captures Yeats's frustration at his own failed love affair. He is desperate to turn from the contemplative of loves' mysteries that have preoccupied him the thing that increased his sorrow without means of improving his situation. That's why he decided to take Fergus' direction and leave love behind him.

Moreover, the reference to the imagery of Fergus is to suggest Yeats's inclination to references to mythic and legendary heritage of his country rather than the present political struggles that engaged Ireland. Accordingly, the question, "Who goes with Fergus?" is a question to ask Ireland to join him in contemplating the mythic past rather than the sticky present.

Finally, in the poem there is a suggestion of a journey towards death. To return to nature, it expresses a movement away from worldly cares and passions analogous to death. Yeats summons the courage that one requires to look beyond the mysteries one knows and suffers under-those of love, of politics- to deeper and wider mysteries- the wood, the sea, the wandering stars.<sup>(40)</sup>

In the first poem of *Crossways*, "The Madness of King Goll", (Yeats gives the only answer he knows to the seas' cry). Goll is the precursor of Fergus in the *Rose* poems and of all the later questers in Yeats who will not find peace by abandoning nature for occult satisfactions. Goll is " a wise young king" praised for bringing back the age of gold, who in the midst of battle yields to the madness of vision, breaks his spear, and rushes off to become a wandering poet in the woods. He finds a "song less" harp, and sings to it; his singing "sang me fever-free," but now "my singing fades, the strings are torn." He is left in one early vision, to "wait beside the sea," now neither poet nor king,



but mad oppressed by the natural. All through the poem beats the refrain: "They will not hush, the leaves-a- flutter around me, the beech-leaves old."<sup>(41)</sup> The long line has uncanny farce, for the lines' meaning changes subtly as it is repeated. At first, the refrain seems to indicate only Goll's madness, the pathetic fallacy run wild, but as the lyric goes on, it comes to be with better understanding that the flattering of the leaves is itself a kind of natural supernaturalism, a force that Goll vainly sought to master, first through kingship and then through poetry. Goll's phantasmagoria fails because it yield to nature, and his kingship failed because it yielded to vision. What matter to Yeats at this point is the poetic failure.<sup>(42)</sup>

Although a nationalistic context was behind Yeats' interest in the ancient Celtic legends, Yeats was interested in reclaiming those legends as mere account of Ireland's history. By using old legends and myths as themes in his work, Yeats was after providing his audience with ideas and emotions that spark a faith in Ireland. So, instead of focusing on reviving the history of Ireland as a static movement; Yeats was interested in making his audience aware of what had already happened to Ireland, but rather in using Ireland's past as a starting point to inspire new feelings about modern Ireland.<sup>(43)</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

Yeats's use of myth and folklore, looks at how, in order to justify his view of Irish independence movement and the value of Irish history, he created his own form of elegiac poetry. Such form explains his poetry, re-created the ancient forms of Irish epic myths based upon old folkloric poems and created a new self enclosed schema of mythology within the framework of his own individual vision.

Also Yeats's use of myth which is an anticipation of modernism is frequently perceived as an attempt to escape from history, to avoid confronting the realities of modern life and from mass culture through to democracy.

## المخلص

قام وليم بتلر بيتس بسبب انحسار الأسطورة و الفلكلور الايرلندي نتيجة لنظام الكنيسة والسيطرة البريطانية على النظام المدرسي باستخدام شعره كأداة لإعادة تعليم الشعب الايرلندي عن تراثهم كوسيلة جديدة لتطوير القومية الايرلندية . لذلك فان مشاركة بيتس بالنظام السياسي الايرلندي لها جذورها في اهتمامه بالأسطورة الايرلندية و الفلكلور الايرلندي.

لقد قام بيتس بإعادة سرد قصص فلكلورية كاملة بقصائد ملحمية و مسرحيات واستخدم كذلك أجزاء من قصص بقصائد قصيرة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك قدم قصائد تتناول موضوعات وصور و أهداف وموضوعات مأخوذة من الفلكلور الايرلندي. والاهم من ذلك قام بيتس بدعم شعره بحس غني من الثقافة الايرلندية، وحتى القصائد التي لا تعني بشكل واضح بمواضيع من الأسطورة فإنها تأخذ خيوط قوية من الحضارة الايرلندية. عادة ما كان بيتس يستعير كلمة منتقاة أو صيغة شعرية أو هيئات من الصور مباشرة من الأسطورة الايرلندية التقليدية والفلكلور الايرلندي .

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