

Symbolism in the Mystical Poetry of W. B. Yeats

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Abstract

*William Butler Yeats was an Irish poet and playwright who lived from June 13, 1865, to January 28, 1939. In his later years, he served as an Irish senator for two terms after serving as a pillar of both the Irish and British literary communities. During the Irish Literary Revival, Yeats helped found the Abbey Theatre with Lady Gregory, Edward Martyn, and others, serving as its artistic director for many years before he passed away in 1939. The Nobel Committee praised his work as "inspired poetry, which in a highly aesthetic manner gives expression to the spirit of a whole nation" when awarding him the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1923. He was the first Irishman to receive the prize. There are few writers, like Yeats, who finished their most important works after receiving the Nobel Prize, including *The Tower* (1928) and *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1932). (1929). Rabindranath Tagore, the Nobel Prize-winning Indian Bengali poet, counted Yeats among his close friends.*

The present article discusses the symbolism in the poetry of W.B. Yeats.

Introduction

Yeats was raised in County Sligo but raised and educated in Dublin. While in his twenties, he pursued a passion for poetry while also becoming captivated by Irish mythology and the paranormal. In his early works, which spanned roughly from the turn of the century till now, these themes are prevalent. A collection of his lyrical poetry, published in 1889, owes a tribute to Edmund Spenser, William Wordsworth, and the Pre-Raphaelites. Yeats' poetry became more muscular and realistic after 1900. It is to say that he had mostly given up on the transcendental ideas of his youth, but his interests remained in masks of all kinds, including physical and spiritual ones. Yeats drew inspiration from sensual adventures and remained a productive writer despite his advanced age and terrible health. "A bizarre second puberty the procedure gave me, the ferment that has come over my mind, has made my present frailty worse," Yeats said in a 1935 letter. Even if I attempt to create poetry, it will be something completely new for me. Oxford Book of Modern Verse, 1892-1935 was his first project as editor, which he started on in 1936. On the 28th of January 1939, he passed away at the Hotel Ideal Sejour in Menton, France. He was laid to rest in Roquebrune-Cap-Martin following a private burial.

The Symbolism in Yeats' Work

Yeats is widely regarded as one of the most important English-language poets of the twentieth century. Allusion and symbolic frameworks were a part of his work as a Symbolist poet, which makes him a noteworthy poet. Yeats carefully selected and arranged his words in such a way that they not only convey a certain meaning but also evoke additional abstract ideas that appear more substantial and resonant. When he uses symbols, they're frequently tangible objects that are also hints at other, more ethereal aspects. When describing symbols, Yeats says that they provoke "indefinable and yet precise feelings," or, as he prefers to think of it: bring down certain disembodied powers whose footsteps over our hearts we call emotions," because of their "preordained energies" or "long connection." While poetry has an emotional influence on the reader, it is born of high emotions, just like art. He says this in his essay:

“Poets are continually making and unmaking mankind”

W. B. Yeats' poems have been dubbed the "master of symbolism" by certain poetry experts and readers who are perplexed by them. He employs poetry's mechanisms, such as rhythm, rhyme, and metre, as well as emotional and intellectual symbolism, to convey emotion and deeper meaning in a limited number of words. *The Second Coming*, *The Valley of the Black Pig*, *Byzantium*, and *No Second Troy*, among others, show his thoughts on rhythm and symbol utilization. Yeats' sensitivity to emotion, as well as the symbols and language he uses to evoke it, set him apart from other poets and writers. According to Yeats' opinion on how rhythm, rhyme, and metre should be used in poetry, he wrote an essay called '*The Symbolism of Poetry*'. He believes that rhythm and metre should be musical rather than stifled by rules. While there is a rhythm and metre to his poetry, he uses it in a way that minimizes its importance in favour of making the poem easier to read. "*The Second Coming*" and "*The Valley of the Black Pig*" are examples of this. It is clear that he cares more about the poem's subject than its metre at times, as evidenced by the variations in rhythm. Lines like this reveal what has been said by him.

“Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out...”
and “The dew drops slowly and dreams gather:
unknown spears
Suddenly hurtle before my dream-awakened eyes...”

It is said that “the objective of rhythm is to prolong the period of reflection, the moment when we are both sleepy and awake and which is a moment of creativity, by hushing us with an alluring monotony while it holds our waking by diversity...”. Rhythm, according to Yeats, lulls us into a trance, because, as he puts it later, "...it keeps us in that state of probably true trance, in which the mind, liberated from pressure of the will, is unfolded in symbols.” Yeats of the opinion that by creating a hypnotic state with musical rhythms like these, the mind is aided in reaching a dreamy condition where everything is expressed and understood through symbols in a purer way than by using reasoning to "pick" at the poetry like most poets do. As a result, his choice for a looser rhythm helps to justify his usage of symbols. In his article, Yeats explains that rhyme is best used for the sake of remembrance. According to popular belief, he intends for the rhyme to be recursive and to establish a link between the first and second lines. By using rhyming words, you're tricking your brain into remembering the phrase or lines preceding the one you just finished reading. In this notion of recursive rhyming, two stitches are sewn forward and one stitch is sewn backwards, creating a storey fragment and an emotional response in the reader's mind. As well, in the same essay, Yeats discusses symbolism in a variety of ways, including as a "language" of dreams, as something emotional or intellectual, and as something that changes over time and from person to person. With these images created by symbolic language, he says, poems should not just have one meaning but many meanings to many people in various eras and locations. Symbols can be felt or perceived in practically all of Robert Frost's poems. In his essay, he discusses the concept of an emotional symbol. Using the word 'purple' to describe hills or clouds is an example of an emotive symbol; it conveys both a seductive and possibly a depressing mood, even though there is no logical justification for it. Yeats also speaks about intellectual symbols, such as the cross, which stands for forgiveness or Jesus, or a white lily, which represents purity, and which can be taught. The most effective symbols, according to Yeats, are those that are intellectual rather than sentimental in nature. He says,

“It is the intellect that decides where the reader shall ponder over the procession of symbols, and if the symbols are merely emotional, he gazes from amid the accidents and destinies of the

world; but if the symbols are intellectual too, he becomes himself a part of pure intellect... If I watch a rushy pool in the moonlight, my emotion at its beauty is mixed with memories...but if I look at the moon herself and remember any of her ancient names and meanings, I move among divine people..."

In Yeats' poem "*The Second Coming*," symbolism such as the gyre, falcon and falconer, lion body, rocking cradle, and Bethlehem can be found, to name just a handful. A sign can have many meanings depending on the individual's understanding, while some, such as the name Bethlehem, exclusively refer to a single location and have a specific historical or theological connotation. Yeats' poetry has a dreamy quality to it because of the symbols and allusions he uses, as well as the emotional hues they paint in the minds of the listeners. As a result, his poetry has multiple levels of significance. When a poem like '*No Second Troy*' is read casually, its language and subject matter elicit a simple emotion. Studying Yeats' life and poetry, however, reveals who the woman he's talking about and why he uses such descriptive language about her.

"taught to ignorant men most violent ways,
Or hurled the little streets upon the great..."

and

"With beauty like a tightened bow,
a kind That is not natural in an age like this,..."

The Byzantine dome, the golden bird perched on the golden twig, and the flames of mosaic on the Emperor's pavement are all essential symbols in "*Byzantium*." They represent the pinnacle of artistic excellence when taken together. They represent immortality and eternity because they are classic works of art. They're as classic and lovely as John Keats' *Grecian Urn*. 'Byzantium has a double symbolic importance,' says T.R Henn. For the last time in history, it symbolizes the interconnectedness of all things. Rather than only inheriting artistry, it may have also inherited the 'mystical mathematics,' or mathematically perfect form, that underlies all artistic creativity. The poem's use of the moon has significant connotations. For starters, the moon represents rhythm and the passage of time because of its phases. Moreover, it symbolizes the various stages of a man's life journey. It refers to the point where the light of the sun and the darkness of the night meet in the middle. It represents the meeting place of the conscious and unconscious selves. '*Byzantium*' has a distinct mood to it. Yeats' use of symbols is discussed by John Unterecker in the following way:

"When it comes to Yeats' work, he takes inspiration from nature, the same natural world that the romantics exalted. A man born outside his time, Yeats valued his symbols in a different way than romantics did because of his self-perception as the "Last of the Romantics." By being 'strange,' his 'masked,' amorous images shock us into realizing their symbolical purpose."

The skyward-soaring dome represents the nexus of heaven and earth, where all things are connected. It is clear that this contrasts sharply with "the rage and muck of human veins." That the golden bird and the golden bough are made of gold speaks volumes. Gold is a rare and expensive metal that will never corrode. The Sun's golden rays represent wisdom and steadfastness. Byzantium represents a place where the eternal struggle between the physical world's constraints and the immortal spirit's aspirations may be resolved. Like the poem '*Byzantium*,' the golden bird is an eternal relic. There are no easy answers to such enigmas as life and death, mortality and immortality, or salvation or redemption, as the poet repeatedly refers to them as 'complexities.' "*Mire*" is a poetic allusion to the eternal cycle of life and death, as well as to man's fundamental connection to the earth's dust and clay. Additionally, "it brings to mind one of the most famous biblical quotes about eating bread till you return to the ground, for it was from there that you were plucked: for you are dust, and dust you must return." The 'mummy fabric' makes it apparent that what's within isn't just a matter of life or death.

Because of this, the poet appears to compare death in 'Byzantium' to the loss of one's physical connection to the land, and views the end of human concerns as a result. The poet has previously used the word 'superhuman' to describe a ghostly figure. This indicates that achieving super-status is impossible during one's lifetime; it is only conceivable after death. Events in poetry such as Byzantium are described in a cosmic manner. Aside from being 'purely symbolical,' Yeats' depictions have helped him to 'keep truth and justice in a single idea.' To put it another way in 'A Vision,' the entire system is built on the assumption that human consciousness falls into a succession of antinomies as the ultimate reality, symbolically represented by the sphere. When attempting to decipher Yeats' poem's cryptic symbolism, readers are met with such paradoxes. The Emperor's pavement is ablaze because of a flash of spiritual insight. As a result, these are divine purgatorial fires. The spirits that Dolphins carry to Byzantium through the sea of time are coated in "mire and blood," where blood denotes an impure or fictitious state. For the unclean spirits, this means they must go through a particularly hard and painful spiritual fire before rising from the ashes like the phoenix. They would become 'superhuman' after this excruciating dance of fire, flames, and faggots. To generate a poetic effect, Yeats intentionally arouses lyrical passion while discussing his symbols. The remark made by B. Chatterjee about Byzantium's usage of symbols is crucial.

“The image after image is evoked-bird..... and these lead
he reader's mind through a crescendo of horror, through the
torture and terror of hell. But is it Hell or Purgatory? Yeats' attitude is ambivalent”.

Yeats is well-versed in the ideas and applications of symbolism in poetry that he has developed over the years. Mechanics and content of his own work demonstrate these attributes. His essay's concepts clearly define and affect his poetry as well as his view of it as a whole. To be sure, he is an iconoclast even among his contemporaries. Symbol knowledge may have had the effect of making the moon more than a moon and the blossom something else. According to J. W. Beach, Yeats is "The finest of the British poets of the present day."

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