

CONCLUSION

And hence one master-passion in the breast,
Like Aaron's Serpent, swallows up the rest.

(Alexander Pope: *Essay on Man, Epistle II*: 1871 : 193)

W.B. Yeats forced his readers to accept him as one of the prime poets of the mainstream English literature of the twentieth century. Yet he was a little apart from the typically British English writers. It is true that Yeats "wrote the English language: Spenser, Blake, Shelley and the pre-Raphaelites were his masters. He was unavoidably an English poet." But "by birth and temperament, by the accident of his upbringing and no less by deliberate and studied choice" (Stock: 1961 : 1-2), he was the poet of the Irish tradition.

It has been argued in recent times that Yeats was more inspired by the English than the Irish. With the help of modern discourses upon "nation" and "nationalism", critics have not only questioned, but even suspected his "nationalism". Whatever be the argument, one is forced to accept the fact that Yeats was definitely an *Irish cultural nationalist, rather than a strictly political one* (emphasis mine). He despised the self-defeating Catholic streak in Republicanism, which sought merely to exchange slavery from London for slavery from Rome or Dublin, supporting James Connolly's assertion that the Puritans among the revolutionaries were seeking to empty "a barrel of rotten apples" just to fill it with "rotten pears". Yeats had never shown extreme fanaticism either in

life or in his poetry. His attitude towards politics changed and modified with time and situation. At one stage he had dreamt of a "Romantic Ireland", but later hinted ironically at the ultimate futility of political action :

Parnell came down the road, he said to a cheering man:

'Ireland shall get her freedom and you still break stone'.

(1993 : 359)

These lines show Yeats as an embittered man who sees man's dearest hopes and ideals shattered. "Church and State" juxtaposes a vision of ideal order with a nightmare of mob violence and official repression. Shocked at the fact that "the ceremony of innocence is drowned", he wrote,

... as my sense of reality deepens, and I think it does with age, my horror at the cruelty of government grows greater, and ... to hold one form of government more responsible than any other ... would betray my convictions. Communist, Fascist, national, clerical, anti-clerical, are all responsible according to the number of their victims ...

(1954 : 851)

Though he was disillusioned, he desperately wished for "a new beginning, a new turn of the wheel" (1962 : 337)

Yeats wanted to preserve "all that has given Ireland a distinguished name in the world" (1956 : 463). We find a distinct change in Yeats's poetry belonging to the period of the Celtic Twilight

and the poems of final phase. I have tried to argue that despite the differences, at no stage can we miss the use of native, home-spun materials. Sometimes the use was conscious. If one accepts the view of the poet as a person of "unilateral stability" (Char: 1956 : 59), then one can say that Yeats's artistic sensibility moved into the foreground, became the determining element and used Ireland, her ideas and common place reality deliberately. Yeats's advice to A.E. comes to mind : "Absorb Ireland ... and you will be the poet of a people, perhaps the poet of a new insurrection" (1954 : 294). At times, the use of Irish materials, ideas, beliefs etc., were purely instinctive, requiring no conscious effort on the part of the poet whatsoever. It is only in retrospect, through the conscious delving on the part of Yeats's critics, that these elements surface and help to establish the essential Irishness of Yeats.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o, East Africa's most politically committed writer, began to write in Gikuyu. He rejected the international medium of English as a sign of protest against the British. In choosing his language deliberately, he identified himself with the peasants of the Kikuyu tribe whose cause he represented. Yeats did not believe like Thiong'o that language can be as political as anything else. Nor did he resemble Kamau Brathwaite who embraced Black Power politics in the 1960s. Brathwaite emphasized the use of a "nation language". This language was influenced very strongly by the African model, containing elements from standard English, Creole, Rastafarian dub, jass and blues to negro spiritual and West African chant. Yeats used

the English language, sometimes with subtle Irish nuances.

Typical local expressions were used by Yeats as early as 1889.

"The Madness of King Goll" uses an Irish exclamation: "ulalu" (1993: 19). In Ireland it is associated usually with mourning. It is also used as an exclamation suggesting wonder and amazement.

The old fisherman laments:

The herring are not in the tides as they were of old:
My sorrow! for many a creak gave the creel in the cart
That carried the take to Sligo town to be sold
When I was a boy with never a crack in my heart.

(1993 : 23)

"Creel" is a wicker basket used to carry fish. In Ireland it is also used to ferry turf or peat. "The Ballad of Father O'Hart" used many peculiarly Irish words. Irish "shoneen" means upstart and "sleiveens" suggest a rogue or a mean-minded person. Irish "caoinim" means "I wail". The word "Keener" has been derived from it to suggest professional mourners who cry for the dead at the funerals in Ireland. Moll Magee mentions the little straws that were "turning around/
Across the bare boreen" (26). She reflects upon the empty lanes of the Irish countryside. In Gaelic Ireland the "Druids" (35) were the conventional priests or healers. "Eire" is still an Irish equivalent for Ireland. "Mo bhron" is transformed by Father Gilligan to "mavrone" (53). It is a cry of grief particularly at the loss of a dear kinsman. The poet wished to be counted among those who sang in the form of

ballad, story, "rann" and song "to sweeten Ireland's wrong" (56). "Raan" stands for a particular verse stanza in Irish and not the entire poem. The phrase 'a mouthful of air' suggests fairies. "Land-under-Wave" (91) represents the enchanted underworld beneath the sea which is also called "Tir-fa-Thoun". 'Dun' (92) is the Irish word for fort. The old crane of Gort mutters : "Am I to live on lebeen-lone?". A minnow or small fish is the lebeen-lone. Yeats used a common Irish expression in "Beggar to Beggar cried": "make my soul" (224). It means a preparation for death. "The Tower" repeats the same expression:

Now shall I make my soul,
Compelling it to study
In a learned school ...

(224)

An ambiguous Irish expression is used in "The Cold Heaven". "Out of all sense" (140) means not only to an extent far beyond what common sense could justify, but also "beyond the reach of sensation". "Shall bend the knee" (297) was a phrase commonly used in Irish political oratory in the 19th century (Jeffares: 1984 : 312). "The Spouse of Naoise, Erin's Woe" uses Irish words like "mo ghradh" (my love), "mo stor" (my treasure), "mo chree" (my heart) and "mo chroi" (my heart) (Jeffares: 1984 : 468). *The Wanderings of Oisín* makes an interesting reference to "orgham". It is an ancient alphabet system comprising of only twenty characters as opposed to the twenty-six characters of the English system. It was used in Ireland

usually in stone inscriptions of the third century. James Arbuckle, the Irish poet of the 18th century who took an active part in politics, used this ancient alphabet system in his works. Yeats's use of the "limb of the Devil" (1993 : 283) is another common expression in Ireland. It was used first by Mc Caffrey in "Ireland from Colony to Nation". In Ireland a mountain pass was considered to be "an airy spot" (379) "Airy" is a variation of "eerie", very often pronounced in Galway and Sligo in both forms. These Irish words, phrases and expressions lend an unmistakable Irish touch to Yeats's poetry.

The contours of the country may be charted in many poems of Yeats. This is a typical tendency found also in Neruda's poems charting the Chilean landscape, Césaire on the Antilles, Faiz on Pakistan and Darwish on Palestine. Edward Said called this impulse "cartographic". From Yeats's childhood Sligo, the island in Lough Gill, influenced him. The small, half-commercial town with Knocknarea on the left and Ben-Bulbin on the right, acts as a background in "The Stolen Child" which first appeared in the *Irish Monthly* in 1886. This poem also marks the shift to Irish scenes. Yeats convinced himself that he should never "go for the scenery of a poem to any country but my own, and I think that I shall hold to that conviction to the end" (1908 : 45). He wrote to Tynan,

... Sligo for me has only memories and sentimentalities accumulated here as a child making it more dear than any other place.

(1954 : 41)

Sligo serves as the scenery for "To an Isle in the Water", "The Lake Isle of Innisfree", his discarded play *The Island of Statues* and his half-finished poem "The Danaan Quicken Tree". "Rosses' point" finds a place in his poetry. It is a seaside village to the northwest of Sligo town, appropriately described by Yeats as "a little sea-dividing sandy plain, covered with short grass, like a green table cloth and lying in the foam midway between the round cairn-headed Knocknarea and Ben Bulbin" (1959 : 88) Glencar Lake in the north east of Sligo also finds a place in "The Stolen Child".

"The Ballad of Father O'Hart" is set in Ireland. Yeats mentions Tiraragh or Teeraree, a townland in the parish of Kilmorgan, County Sligo; Ballinafad is the village in the parish of Aughanagh, on the Sligo road near Boyle; Inmishmurray is an island in the Atlantic, off Sligo Coast, near Streedagh Point. It had been named after the Bishop of Killala, St. Muireadhach. "Dromahair" (49), a village in Leitrim near the river Bonnet, "Lugnagall" (49), a townland in the Glen lar valley in Sligo, "Lissadell", "Scanavin", "Hart Lake", "Dooney Rock", "Kilvarnet", "Morcharabuice" are distinct Irish locations. Coole Park, the estate of Lady Gregory in Galway, with its woods "Kyle-na-no" (175) and "Paire-na-lee" (85), was considered the seat of aristocratic culture in Ireland. These Irish locations help to establish the fact that Yeats deliberately tried to project a picture of Ireland through his poems.

Yeats brought into his poetry not only the Irish hills and vales

like Knocknarea, Knocknashee, Ben Bulbin, Kilvernet, Sligo and Cummen Strand, but also Irish characters from the past and present. He eulogized Irish heroes through the legends and myths. Along with them came the saintly priest, the muttering fisherwoman, Howth's crazy woman and the old Wicklow peasant. The use of local customs, traditions, superstitions, omens and even the ballad form show how Yeats utilized his native resources.

At the end of Yeats's long poetic career, he seemed to look back. When he reminisced, he could see his created pyramid crumbling at places. The poet seemed to be groping, trying to find things afresh. There is a change in his interest in politics. But his interest in Ireland never flagged. Despite all oscillations, Yeats seemed to suggest that with time "you learn your roots are deep" (R. Parthasarathy: Exile : 75). Like Darwish's lover from Palestine Yeats tried to say:

Restore to me the colour of face
And the warmth of body
The light of heart and eye
The salt of bread and earth ... the Motherland.

(Darwish: A Lover from Palestine : 23)

The pangs and joys of Ireland come out through Yeats's poetry. Therefore, it is difficult to agree with Henry Gifford who said that Irish nationalism, "intense, narrow and doctrinaire". (1969 : 23), blocked Yeats's path. Pablo Neruda called him a national poet who represented the Irish nation in its war against tyranny. Edward Said

believed he was an Irish poet with more than strictly local Irish meaning and application. It is true to say that he was a great modern Irish poet, deeply affiliated to his soil, interacting constantly with his native traditions, and the historical and political context of his times. He was in an extraordinarily complex situation of being a poet in Ireland writing in English. Eliot said, "... he was one of those few whose history is the history of their own time, who are a part of the consciousness of an age which cannot be understood without them" (1986 : 262). Saying like Tagore: "Not to alms, indebted to the soil I am" (1991 : 143: trans. mine), Yeats realised that all that he said or sang came "from contact with the soil" and "from that/Contact everything Antaeus-like grew strong" (1993 : 369).