

Autobiographical history in yeats english literature essay

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



Nowhere is Yeats's autobiographical aspect is better articulated than in his early poetry or in what might be called his pastoral phase. In this phase the poet's life come to be involved more and more and the urgency and importance of the personal experience manifests itself in the form of allegorical maintain of the particularity of the moment. My main concern in this chapter is to show the different poetic strategies deployed by the Yeatsian text at this stage to blur boundaries between the poet and the man. Yeats' s self- consciousness of the moment grew to familiarize the relation between the poetic self and the man's self. The intentional fusion of the text with the being is growing to fix up a poetry that cannot be distanced from life. Yeats once declared that his life is articulated through his verses, he said: Yet this I know: I am no idle poetaster. My life has been in my poems. To make them I have broken my life in a mortar.... I have brayed in it youth and fellowship, peace and worldly hopes. I have seen others enjoying, while I stood alone with myself-commenting, commenting, a mere dead mirror on which things reflect themselves. I have buried my youth and raised over it a cairn-of clouds.[1]This declaration is a set of words which comes beyond the consciousness of Yeats himself with the autobiographical aspect of his writings. It's true that the term " autobiography"[2]can be defined differently but the fact that poetry is a way of commenting in one's life is fully appropriate to several definitions of " autobiography" as lexis. This is precisely the view of recent theorists such as Jean Starobinski who writes: " Toute autobiographie...est une auto-interpretation."[3]Yeats is not merely far from expressing the conviction that an autobiographer shall present a judgment on his past. More than this, he made of his poetic text a way for

framing out the lived moment. As I had said before, Yeats poetry is what is produced out of context, an excess of intense emotion is the ultimate monitor of expression. The poet reproduced a minimal restrained form of poetry which correspondingly of a great signification when related to his life and he also wrote a long poetry which delivers his inns of being. No matter his poetry is long or short when it provides us which several cliché of the experienced moment. As far as short forms of poetry is concerned, one can cite " the White Birds", " The lover Mourns for the Loss of Love" and " A Dialogue of Self and Soul,". These poems stand as a kind of head-piece to Yeats's most famous and clear-cut statement of his sentimental life. They share the criteria of being dressed for a determined occasion as an attempt to historicize the event. But, Yeats also made of these poems -like others, traces for a précised moment related to his private life as an attempt to historicize his personal experience. At that level, one can cite the term of " biographical time"[4]used firstly by Khalifa when referring to " the consciousness of an age"[5], he said:" Yeats consciousness at same time of biographical time (old age), chronology (fin-de siècle reality) and history (modernity) has almost been unequalled in the history of poetic thematization." to underline the subjective aspect of history in Yeats. For instance, " The White Birds"[6]is written to Maud Gonne, who had been walking with him on the cliffs at Howth the day after he had first proposed to her and been rejected. They were resting when two seagulls flew overhead and out to sea. She told him that if she were to have the choice of being any bird she would prefer to be a seagull above all. Yeats was terribly touched because of Gonne's refusal of his proposal, so he wrote: I would that we

were, my beloved, white birds on the foam of the sea! We tire of flame of the meteor, before it can fade and flee; And the flame of the blue star of twilight, hung low on the rim of the sky Has awaked in our hearts, my beloved, a sadness that may not die. (P-75) Yeats gave birth to this poem out of a specific context; he suffered because he cannot be Maud's husband.

Therefore, he and his beloved are far from being two halves of the same but only poetry made of them two similar "white birds on the wandering foam".

Unity is far to be realized in the real life, Yeats made of this unity a real fact through his poetic imagination. He reconstructed the "I and you" into a unique symbol of "white birds" to share the unique resemblance. Certainly, the poetic "I" is the same as the "self" and the poem in these terms stands for an autobiographical record of the Yeats the man. Another explicit

example of the autobiographical dimension of Yeatsian poetry is to be noted through "The Lover mourns for the Loss of love". The poem describes a sad moment in Yeats's relationship with Olivia Shakespeare [7], whom he met in 1894 and with whom he had his first affair in 1896; and consequently they had been separated for long years. He said Pale brows, still hands and dim hair I had a beautiful friend And dreamed that the old despair would end in love in the end: She looked in my heart one day And saw your image was there; She has gone weeping away. (P-95) Later in 1905, he wrote about

another circumstance in his life, always talking about his experienced event that touched him profoundly which paved the way to the title of "O Do Not Love too long". Through this poem Yeats is referring to his close friendship with Maud Gonne who unexpectedly got married to John Mac Bride in 1903.

He set an opposition between "Sweetheart" who "do not love too long" and

the poetic " I" who " loved long and long". Then he described their complicity of thoughts in the past and how things rapidly changed. The poet is messaging his beloved and he is blaming for their separation. All through the years of our youthNeither could have knownTheir own thought from the other's. We were so much at one. But O, in a minute she changed—O do not love too long, Or you will grow out of fashionLike an old song.(P 135-6)The poetic " I" is Yeats and " Sweetheart" is definitely Maud Gonne and the " O" of interjection is well experienced by Yeats the man after her marriage. So, Yeats the poet cannot be separated from the poetic self since he transmitted real sequences of his life. Feelings of love nostalgia are really experienced by the poet, and poetry in that sense is the translator instrument for his " woos". Yeats poetry in that sense exposes his personal life but also it offers an exaggerated meaning to the experienced events since brevity—which is designing Yeats short poems—is a kind of artistic control that derives from excess of meaning itself. This fact merits considerations in relation to Yeats because; it furnishes insights into how the peculiar emotional effects are created. So senses, from which he perceives things, are vehicles to create of Yeats the poet a subject for his writings. In fact, the psychological profile of the poet made of him an implicit subject of his verses and at the meantime, it made of him a poet in action. He is not in a static position, since his poetry acts for him. In other words, Yeats's words are a manifest for his experiences, and the question is if Yeats had made the choice to expose his being through his writings or if he is the one who live just through his words. Authenticity and simplicity of emotions are certainly a continuation for the romantic tradition of the nineteenth century but the incorporation of specific

autobiographical references makes of Yeats an original and unique poet that cannot be confused with others. The reader can make an easy identification of the poet, even if the personae may differ from one poem to another. It's true that Yeats introduced several personas to his poems to aesthetes his words, but the concrete biographical and narrative aspect seem to take off the aesthetic device to enclose the sincere confession and the personal revelation. Yeats wrote in a letter addressed to his father: " I have tried for more self- portraiture. I have tried to make my work convincing with a speech so natural and dramatic that the hearer would feel the presence of a man thinking and feeling.... It is in dramatic expression that English poetry is most lacking as compared with French poetry. Villon always and Ronsard at times create a marvelous drama out of their own lives." [8] In " A prayer for my Daughter," [9] the reader can see the " natural speech" of the man who " thinking and feeling" and perhaps for these reasons it is classified as an autobiographical poem by excellence. Through which, Yeats exteriorizes his intimate nice wishes to his child. He would like that Ann would be prevented from misfortunes that frapped his mother's life and Maud Gonne's one. 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-level ling wind, Bred on the Atlantic, can be stayed; And for an hour I have walked and prayed Because of the great gloom that is in my mind. Yeats, the man, is in front of his new born daughter, she is on sleep. He felt threaten for his child from the stormy weather as well as the stormy life that can be faced with later. A random storm is frapping the island. He is threatened for his infant to be " haunted by the evils that had befallen the

two women dearest to him in his youth." [10] Yeats prayed for his daughter May she be granted beauty, and yet not Beauty to make a stranger's eye distraught... It's certain that fine women eat A crazy salad with their meat Whereby the Horn of Plenty is undone... O may she live like some green laurel Rooted in one dear perpetual place... to be chocked with hate May well be of all evil chances chief... And may her bridegroom bring her to house Where all's accustomed, ceremonies... How but in custom and in ceremony Are innocence and beauty born? Ceremony's for the rich horn, And custom for the spreading laurel tree. These verses describe the intimate feelings of the poet and give traces to his "gloomy" mood in the real life. He wished that his daughter would be saved from the disastrous beauty of Maud Gonne. Likely, he wandered if she would be saved from the unstable life that his mother had. The poet suffering's causes are clearly experienced through the text. More than that, the reader can detect a feeling of guiltiness towards two beloved women—feeling that he ought to have been able to protect them and yet not having succeeded—so Yeats' attempt to save his daughter is an act of self-consolation. He is calming his past's wounds through articulating personal poetry. Enclosed by the emotional slither and the psychological movement, Yeats goes beyond textualising personal suffering's experiences to mark the geographical boundaries. The notion of place is closely discussed as a referent to the emotional revelations of the poet. Of course, to argue that Romanticism is characterized by emotions, and Yeats is the poet dominated by feelings, would be a great simplification. Some Romantics remained closer to their autobiographical history than others and Yeats is the one who acted through his poetry. Feelings and

places are two dimensions of the experimented poetry in Yeats. Emotional aspect encounters the spacial settlement to reproduce the event. The notion of belonging is closely related to autobiographical texts. It stems its origins relatively from the spatial and temporal aspects. Yeats does not maintained the " cool distance"[11]of the romantic poets, on the contrary he get been fused with the dimensions of the event. Yeats made of his poetry a triple dimensioned work. Time, place and person are paramount of the poetic text in Yeats Even if he used often different persona to express feelings indirectly, he had always been the center of his poetic text. In other words, the spacial and temporal aspects of the event are always reporting the " self" fused within like a palimpsest. On closer inspection, the notion of fusion is seen as a result from Yeats's singular treatment of time, place. All references to time are purposely either vague or précised while those to place are specific and concrete. The reader always knows where the persona is but he rarely knows when a certain incident takes place. So places as references are rarely to be separated from the persona. Thus, geographical indices are far to be innocently introduced. They are closely related to the poetic " I" since they are matched to the poet. Yeats declared in the opening sentences of *Reveries upon...*: " It seems as if time had not yet been created, for all thoughts are connected with emotion and place without sequence."[12]The poet confirms this interrelated relationship between space and emotion. My point is that Yeats's geographical places are articulated not merely in the act of Citing Irish historical monuments and natural sites, but rather more significantly, they are voiced in the very act of cultural resistance. The act is not only a manifest for the revival of the pastoral; it is also a manifest of an

Irish belonging pride. This notion is directly related to his feelings of nationhood as a resisting form. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said claimed: "One of the first tasks of the culture of resistance...was to reclaim, rename, and reinhabit the land. And with that came a whole set of further assertions, recoveries, and identifications, all of them quite literally grounded on this poetically projected base." [13] At that level, one can cite "The Man Who Dreamed of Faeryland" through which Yeats enumerates several Irish rural locales: He stood among a crowd at Drumahair...He wandered by the sands of Lissadell...He mused beside the well of Scanavan...He slept under the hill of Lugnagall...P (43-44) "The Hosting of the Sidhe" is another example in point: The host is riding from Knocknaria And over the grave of Clooth-na-Bare; Caoilte tossing his burning hair, And Niamh calling Away, come away: Empty your heart of its mortal dream. (P55) Poetization of the nationhood is, at the same time, an attempt to celebrate the nation and the selfhood. The poetic self cannot be extorted from his "aesthetic nationalism." [14] The poet as an artist possesses national impulses of Yeats. Also, he re-introduces the Irish geographical places into the mainstream culture. That is to say, the poet is Yeats in action. He is the one who reconsolidating selfhood by reviving his Irish belongingness. So far, the Irishness of a whole nation is celebrated through the poet's cultural memory. Yeats affirmed that the sense of community is inextricable from literary works of the age, he said: There is still in truth upon these plains a people, a community bound together by imaginative possessions, by stories and poems which have grown out of its own life, and by the past of great passions which can still waken the heart to imaginative action [...] Does not

the greatest poetry always require a people to listen to? England or any other country which takes its tunes from the great cities and gets its taste from schools and not from old custom may have a mob, but it cannot have a people.[15]A culmination in a set of close readings can explore some of the tension above the question of nationhood with relation to selfhood. It is true that the simplicity and authenticity of emotions are originating their roots from Romanticism. But the incorporation of specific autobiographical references is to canonize the Irish belongingness and to give to a concrete biographical aspect. At that stage, one can talk about dates as an essential dimension in concretizing Yeats' selfhood. Several titles in the Yeatsian texts are to assume such representation of the Self.

5- The Tower as a celebration of Yeats's life

My main concern in this chapter is to draw a parallel between " The Tower" as a lyric and Yeats as a being. My aim is to show that " The Tower" is a representative symbol of Yeats. To be more explicit, the ancient stone tower in Western Ireland, the lyric of 195 lines and the life of Yeats are aspects of emotional Myth. That is to say, that this myth is gradually constructed through senses and internal reactions towards an immediate environment. From the very beginning, the title of the poem provided a setting for the speaker who refers to his movements through the Tower to its top. The poet declares in " Blood and the Moon,"[16]: I declare this tower is my symbol; I declareThis winding, gyring, spiring treadmill of a stair is my ancestralstair;(P 351)So the poet finally identifies himself entirely with " the tower" though not with the classical inherited static image which having a light at the top, as presented by Victorian poetry, but rather a new one dynamized by the

spiral staircase motif. Thus Yeats is assuming that his action in life is a gradual elevation towards the top. The movement of the poet is going to a higher position but it is limited through the space from which his "ancestral" passed. The poet is alienating himself with his ancestors in a way that he assuming his belonging to the place and therefore to the geographical limits of the Ireland. The declaration of Yeats is far to be empty from the resisting stony structure of a "Tower". "The tower" as monument is the symbol of Yeats's life as the poet's declaration suggested and "The tower" as poem is the story of his life since setting, speaker and a movement are fundamental devices of any storytelling. To put it differently, the tower is the symbol of the place, the poem is the narration of Yeats life and the movement is in turn the plot of the story. The "Tower" as monument is called Thoor Ballyley, in the Western Ireland; it is purchased by Yeats in