

Yeats as a religious poet

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Abstract

W.B. Yeats occupies a very important place in the 20th century literature as a modern and religious poet. This paper highlights Yeats as a religious poet. His poems are not only complex but they are religious in nature. It has both structure and texture. His poems like Second coming, Easter 1916, A prayer for my Daughter and Among School children resolves the antinomies or the dichotomy between body and soul, the self and the spirit, the mortal conditions and immortal longings by providing an image and a symbol. He makes use of religious symbols in his poems. The poem second coming recall to us Christ's prediction of the second coming in St. Mathew 24 and St. Johns' description of the beast. Yeats who believed that a combination of the ritual gesture and purity of heart formed the basis of all civilized being. The word he uses 'Falcon' itself is a symbol of intellect and objectivity.

“Turing and Turing in the widening gyre”.

The above shows that Yeats as a matured modern religious poet. Talking about soul and body the poet is reminded of philosophers like Plato, Aristotle. In Sailing to Byzantium he speaks of cathedral dome of the city. He speaks the life of violence, lust has to come to an end in life then only man can be a religious. I have tried to explore by reading his poem 'Yeats as a modern mind with religious aspects.

KEYWORDS Modernity, Religion, Falcon, Christianity, spiritualism

Introduction:

W.B Yeats reacted against the trends of modernity in his poems. His poems reflect his anxiety towards modernity. Yeats' literary theory and religious aspects shared deep commonalities with another great poet of the 20th century T.S Eliot. Both poets are religious in nature. They are modern minds with religious aspects. W.B Yeats as a religious poet throughout his career sought to re-embodiment the free unconsenting spirit through the traditional symbols of myth and folklore. 'The second coming' one of the truly prophetic poems of W.B Yeats which speaks of his poetic symbolism and Christian aspects. Many of the modern poems as a whole tend to deal with Christianity. Many of his poems highlight God's power spiritualism and mystical idealism. Yeats using the word 'Falcon' shows he is a matured religious poet. In many of his poems he takes the readers into the deeper world of mythical embodiment.

William Butler Yeats wrote: "I seek an image of the modern mind's discovery of itself. Yeats spoke to the modern mind in every way. The rise of nationalism and the political problems, the shattering and challenging effects of new science on old beliefs, the re opening of every question of truth and value all these elements entered his

imagination and were there absorbed and transmuted into the symbolic structure of his poetry.

Yeats is the least 'experimental' in any obvious sense of that word, of the great modern poets. Yeats in many of his poems presents the features of modernism. A brilliant example is 'Easter 1916'. The poem is a palinode celebrating the death and resurrection of the Irish patriots recalling resurrection and rebirth. The sacrifice has transformed them all. The poet who once looked down upon them now looks up to them. They have been utterly transformed. 'A terrible beauty is born.' The sacrifice has meant for these countrymen of his, and for the poet himself, a marvelous rebirth of a sort. So far we may consider the poem a glorification of Irish nationalism and its struggles. But in the second half of the poem there comes an important turn. The poet presents a new image, outside the political and specifically Irish context altogether, for his theme of transformation through sacrifice.

Hearts with one purpose alone
Through summer and winter seem
Enchanted to a stone
To trouble the living stream.

Modern poetry as a whole tends to be tragic in its assumption that we are at a cultural dead end, in which myriad values at cross purposes with modern political values the most virulent of all, are choking each other to death. The major poetic situation is the struggle of a heroic sensibility, or self, to free itself from the condition of living death imposed by this murderous predicament. It is easy to be rhetorical about such values as patriotism and martyrdom, political or religious. It is as easy to get disillusioned about these values as the soldier poets of the first world war were. There is shrubs what is 'temporal' becomes eternal.

The Second coming:-

The second coming which attempts to give us a symbol/ directly relevant to our own era. Yeats 'believed' that we were approaching the end of another 'Great year.' The Christian Era draws to a close and a new annunciation is at hand, foreshadowed in the modern political situation. He says modern politics as nothing but the manipulation of popular enthusiasm by false news. 'The danger was that all traditional lines of value and communication, the whole heritage of man's best creativity, would be destroyed by a 'manipulation'. So violent and ruthless that neither the old beauties of life nor the old capacity to resist and 'to keep one's well pure could survive much longer:

Turning and Turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer.
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold.

The poem not only spread of totalitarianism in its new forms but the second world war and the rise of every imaginable destructive force. It marks the culmination of a drift sensed first by poets many years ago, and perhaps it expresses the death wish of modern culture. Another series of images follows, with the further pronouncement that a new era, a second coming with its own incarnation and revelations, must surely be at hand.

The system helped Yeats to see also his own personality and the relationships between science and religion as elements to be manipulated by art. "In sailing to Byzantium. The poet uses himself in his old age as such a symbolic and dramatic element in his play. 'The resurrection he converts in a remarkable way the religious attitudes represented by his characters into aspects of the great oppositions defined in a vision. Christ resurrected is but the fusion of pure physicality and pure spirituality mysteriously embodied very early, then, Yeats begins to use the method of setting interpenetrating opposites against one another as a deliberate way of discovering the character of the human predicament and of exploring the challenge it offers. As one reads his Autobiography and other writings, one is recurrently struck by his almost professionally practical attitude toward the uses of super natural symbolism. Besides folklore, he was interested in theories of the occult to spiritualism and mystical idealism of every sort, including that of Plato and Plotinus. His attraction to these cults and doctrines had many motivations, but one was over riding a belief that they provided valuable clues to the unconscious life of mind and spirit and therefore to the sources of creative imagination. He sought a kind of antiscientific science whose touchstones were the 'touchstones were the 'truths' of myth and art. He wished, he wrote, to be able to hold in a single thought reality and justice the difficult reality of experience and the justice of pure vision.

'Pure vision' in Yeats is strongly related to ordinary experience. The world of symbols is not a humane or humanly ordered world, but men in their animal lives as well as in their aspirations are as it were its raw materials. As we have already seen, it is charged with the sexual principle. Yeats reverts again and again to the great paradox and mystery of our conscious life.

But love has pitched his mansion in

The place of excrement

The relation of men to the great cycles of cultural history is another phase of this duality. In Yeats's later work especially the relationship assumes great importance. Do these cycles, in some measure, take their meaning from man himself, or is man merely the passive instrument of an indifferent during or creative principle? Some of Yeats finest plays deal with this theme, and in many works he uses as central symbols sacred events of myth and religion in order to present it as suggestively as possible.

The sonnet 'Leda and the swan'. Written when Yeats was in his peak of achievement. It begins with the full shock of the Swan's swooping attack upon Leda and the first eight lines linger over the sensual details of her surrender to the god's power. She feels 'the strange heart beating' against hers strange because it is the heart not only of another being but of one at once more bestial than she and more divine a 'feathered

glory.’ To make vivid this moment in western mythical history Yeats considers the scene as its human participant must have felt it in all its physical immediacy and mystery. In the sestet he reminds us of the mythical events subsequent to this union; the birth of Helen, the Trojan war. The poem ends asking if Leda’s intelligence as well as her womb was impregnated by the god. Is she, the passive human recipient of the seeds of the future, now charged with the god’s divinity in her own right? In this concluding passage, Yeats lets the poem fall from the present to the past tense. He has made the ancient scene burst upon our sight and our to her senses, has made us realize, through the way it is enacted before us, the impact of the pagan which began the pre-Christian phase of our civilization. Thus Yeats is the least ‘experimental’ in any obvious sense of that word, of the great modern poets.

The great deal can be learned from ‘Sailing to Byzantium’ about attitudes toward death, Sex, oldage and art. But whatever we thus learn is incidental to the terrible, blazing confrontation of the two spheres of being, each remote from the other yet inseparable from it. The poem comes close to pure symbolism, in the free play it allows thought and feeling over images of the widest possible relevance.

Thus in the famous ‘sailing t Byzantium’ the speaker is an old man between two world. Or, rather, he is deep within this world, which has all but rejected him and which he now wishes to repossess in a new way by becoming part of a world of pure creativity in which the fleshly is transformed into the eternal.

In these poems Yeats found ways to meet the profoundest needs of the modern mind with absolute courage and joy. The freedom the system helped him find enabled him to use it without becoming its creature. Irish countryside its speech and lore, and later to its desire for independence and his participation in the more cosmopolitan artistic and literary life of London influenced all his writing. We can see in his poems Yeats representing modern mind and his poems reflect the features of modernism. He is a modern poet with religious aspects.

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