

**WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS: NATIONALISM, MYTHOLOGY,  
AND THE NEW IRISH TRADITION**

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### **Abstract**

William Butler Yeats has been regarded as one of the most important poets of the modern era. His poetry is known throughout the world for its attention to form, masterful imagery, and its distinctly Irish nature. Always a patriot, much of Yeats' life was devoted to the resurrection of Irish culture in what he hoped would be a Celtic Renaissance free from the heavily political implications of the Irish nationalist movement of his time. This essay seeks to discuss and understand Yeats' methods and inspirations behind conveying his nationalism and love of Irish lore through his poetry, especially in his earlier years of publication. He was concerned not just with people's knowledge of Ireland and her storied past, but also with the cultural wellbeing of Ireland's future, especially when it came to fostering future Irish artists and creative types. This essay examines seven works by Yeats organized into three sections, each individual section representing a different point in his creative journey towards finding his voice for Ireland's future writers and artists. His hope was to foster the creation of a literary tradition that was Irish in its roots for the entertainment, advancement, and representation of a thoroughly Irish people. This paper seeks to discover how exactly he went about attempting to create such a tradition.

## **The Purpose and Methods of Yeats**

William Butler Yeats has been regarded by many as one of the last, if not truly the absolute last, of the Romantic poets. He was an heir to their sense of folk-art, their appreciation of ancient customs, and the awesome power of the mysticism of the natural world; but, above all, he most fully encapsulated the Romantic sense of nationalism. Yeats was an Irishman above all else, and unrepentantly proud of his heritage. As such, Yeats often took up the banner of Ireland in his poetry, weaving great tales and images of Irish heroes of old and the days before the outside world made its landing on Irish shores. He sought to capture the character of ancient Ireland and instill his love and inspiration into the hearts of his readers. His use of simpler language and clear imagery, combined with the lyrical traditions of his motherland, was intended to be readily understood by not just the upper-class and well-educated, but also by the layman and most importantly the future generations of Ireland. Utilizing Irish myth and a palpable sense of pride, Yeats set out from his early years as a writer to change Ireland for the better in the years yet to arrive.

Perhaps the most defining characteristic of Yeats' poetry was his longing for Ireland to turn inwards artistically. He wanted his fellows to forgo telling more stories about those same foreign heroes that have been told time and time again across Europe, such as Odysseus, Hercules, King Arthur, Roland, or Aeneas, . Instead, he wants Irish literature for Ireland. He states in a letter to Katharine Tynan that, "I feel more and more that we shall have a school of Irish poetry – founded on Irish myth and history – a neo-romantic movement" (Wade, 33). To this end he set about creating stories surrounding characters from old Irish mythology. But this was not his only method; rather, Yeats' poetry in general takes on a quite lyrical approach, being highly structured and organized to represent the traditional Irish delivery of tales by a bard. He

claimed, "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" (Thuente, 243). Yeats did not simply want his poetry and the poetry of Irish origin to be read; instead, he wanted it to be heard, to be sung and shouted out loud for all to hear in the old oral tradition of the island.

Yeats also wished to break away from any thickly-set connections to the English. He held a strong distaste for how the English rule of Ireland had left Irish culture barren and desolate, a shadow of its former self left behind in the wake of conquering English boots. As a young man he visited England and found that he was displeased with what he saw there. He says in a letter to Katharine Tynan that in London, ". . . you cannot go five paces without seeing some wretched object broken either by wealth or poverty." (Wade, 35). The industrial side of England stood in stark contrast to much of the imagery he would use to describe the Ireland he loved and long for, much of which was green and wild, Druidic with a sense of misty wonder about it. But more than anything else he sought to break from English influence in order to give Ireland her sense of power back. He said of his partnership with the Lady Augusta Gregory, "We work to add dignity to Ireland" ("Autobiographies", 456). He did not simply want Irish literature and culture to be known again, he wanted it to be respected and hold its place alongside the other nations of the world with its head held high. Yeats did not want the folklore and mythology of Ireland to be regarded simply as idle folk stories of a long-since crumbled culture and tradition.

Yeats' method of communicating his purpose in his poems was almost never directly stated, and he often spoke through his numerous characters both born out of Irish myth and from his own mind. In an essay on magic, he summarized his beliefs of the relationship between the figures of the artist and the magician, whom he believed were closely intertwined. He said, ". . . all men, certainly all imaginative men, must be for ever casting forth enchantments, glamours,

illusions . . .” (Ellmann, 90). Through figures like Oisín, Aengus, Michael Robartes, Owen Aherne, and numerous others, Yeats delivered his beliefs to his audience discreetly so that they would never feel lectured to, rather simply witnesses to a character’s state of mind. Oisín’s sorrow over the loss of his people, Aengus’ search for his maiden, and Robartes and Aherne’s debates all contributed differing perspectives on not only how Yeats viewed his world, but also how he struggled within himself. Often times his narrator would be a nameless storyteller, allowing him to gain his distance from his reader without betraying his purpose into the form of a lecture. However, this often creates conflict within his own literature, as, “. . . what he had hoped to do, and increasingly succeeded in doing so, was to mold both occultism and nationalism into his art. No sooner had he pulled himself into two parts and set them at odds than he wanted to make peace between them . . .” (Ellmann, 115). Because he felt the urge to blend both nationalism and mysticism into his art, he would need to seek a compromise between them. Often he did, but even the Irish characters themselves seem to struggle with their sense of place at times, and perhaps this is what gives much of Yeats’ poetry that great sense of longing that endures through so much of his life’s work.

### **Finding a Voice: *The Wanderings of Oisín* and *The Rose***

Yeats’ first attempt at tackling the idea of Irish literature in the modern age was manifested in his *The Wanderings of Oisín* (1889). This epic poem is, in many ways, similar to Homer’s *The Odyssey*. Both tales center around a character who longs for home, is something of a man out of time when he returns to his own country, and is a great intellectual figure. However, Yeats does not go down the same path as many of his contemporaries would have by invoking Odysseus himself, or the same Greek muses that Homer once did; rather, Yeats decides to instead tell an Irish story about a great Irish hero. Yeats’ story is distinctly regional, though

equally timeless. He says of folk literature that, "All folk literature, and all literature that keeps the folk tradition, delights in unbounded and immortal things" (Thuente, 266). However, Yeats was unhappy with this poem. Though it regaled to the reader the love between Oisín and Naemh, the glory of the Fenians, and the timeless story of a culture and land lost by time, he felt that the whole creation was, in the end, too unclear and esoteric. Initially he had intended the poem to be unclear, so as to fill the hearts of his readers with romance and wonder. He said in a letter to Kathrine Tynan, "In the second part of 'Oisín' under the guise of symbolism I had said several things to which only I have the key. The romance is for my readers. They must not even know there is a symbol anywhere. They will not find out. If they did it would spoil the art", yet within a week's time of the poem's publication, he wrote to Tynan again, this time declaring, "'Oisín' needs an interpreter" (Ellmann, 52). Thusly, Yeats would set out from this point onwards towards a greater clarity of his purpose so that there would be no more confusion clouded by a lust for esoteric imagery.

In 1893, Yeats published his collection of poetry dubbed *The Rose*. In this collection, Yeats' poetry took on his new clarity of purpose. As with his earlier works, these poems displayed Yeats' clear fascination with the mysticism of ancient times. This interest in the occult had been fostered by an influential Theosophist of the time, Helena Blavatsky. She enthralled Yeats with her fusion of a modern faith with a more ancient understanding of divinity. Her teachings and appeal to the mystical were backed by the claim that "She had access, she said, to an oral tradition, for the true and secret doctrine had never been allowed to disappear completely even from a degenerate earth" (Ellmann 57). This fixation on the mystical and mythological is clear in *The Rose*, which contains poems heavily drawing from stories of Cuchullain, Fergus, faeries of all sorts, and a sense of a living Ireland. At the same time, though, Yeats' sensibilities

fell on the skeptical in the practical sense of these musings. He seemed to enjoy what they brought to the table in terms of the grand history of the ancient world outside of the Greek, Roman, and Anglican stories already permeating the world's literature, but his true purpose was never to convince you of the validity of the stories. It seemed as though "Yeats' attitude towards the mystic quest is that of the lion-hunter who pauses before shooting to remind his attendants that hunting is a dangerous and possibly foolish sport. But for all that occultism was his 'secret fanaticism'" (Ellmann, 44). Beyond the occult, nationalism was Yeats' favorite pastime, and indeed a strong and pointed sense of nationalism pervades *The Rose*, but unlike *The Wanderings of Oisín*, Yeats would not hide behind esotericism and clouded symbolism.

*To the Rose Upon the Rood of Time* opens up Yeats' 1893 collection. The image of a rose, as the title of the collection suggests, is a prominent one throughout the series. Yeats remarked that, "the Rose is a favourite symbol with the Irish poets . . . in addresses to Ireland" (Finneran, 478). The poem is an appeal to Ireland to listen to his words so that they may be inspired by his tales. He calls upon the people of Ireland saying, "Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days! / Come near me, while I sing the ancient ways: / Cuchulain battling with the bitter tide; / The Druid, grey, wood-nurtured, quiet-eyed" (1-4). There again the reader sees the mystical qualities of the stories that are to come in the collection, yet they are direct in nature. There is no question about the topics which the reader will find within, no grand symbol outside of the Rose itself. Yeats at this point in his journey had become more concerned with his message being understood than weaving some impressive image at the expense of his readers, though he still wants them to feel the beauty and weight of the stories he feels himself. He expresses this contradiction when he says, "Come near, come near, come near - Ah, leave me still / A little space for the rose-breath to fill! / Lest I no more hear common things that crave"

(13-15). He still seeks beauty and desires to bring it to the common people of Ireland so that they may feel great again, but he is worried that if he becomes too enthralled by this aesthetic lust that he will once more lose the clarity of his purpose. If he does not hold on to his love of common things he will drift back to the overly-poetic. The poem also contains a great sense of urgency; the narrator is convinced that he must spread his nationalistic love of Ireland quickly. In a fashion common to Yeats' poetry, his narrator takes on the sense that he has little time left to teach Ireland of her rich and storied past, though Yeats himself was only twenty-eight years old at the time of the publication of *The Rose*. He says, "Come near; I would, before my time to go, / Sing of old Eire and the ancient ways" (22-23). Yeats clearly had a story to tell the people, and he would tell it before his time was up.

The fusion of nationalism and Irish mystical history truly comes together in the final poem of *The Rose*, which is titled *To Ireland in Coming the Times*. As the title suggests, the poem is addressed to the Ireland of the future, quite possibly when he is already long gone. Yeats begins the poem with the declaration, "Know, that I would accounted be / True brother of a company / That sang, to sweeten Ireland's wrong, / Ballad and story, rann and song" (1-4). As with the poem that began *The Rose*, Yeats is making clear to his audience that he writes for Ireland, for the people of Ireland, and for the continuation and advancement of their culture. He speaks also of how the old Irish world still lives within him, and that, in fact, it is a present force in everything he does. He claims, "For the elemental creatures go / About my table to and fro . . . Man ever journeys on with them / After the red-rose-bordered hem. / Ah, faeries, dancing under the moon, / A Druid land, a Druid tune!" (23-32). The imagery of elemental and Druidic figures hearkens back to pre-Christian Ireland when the Druids held sway over the island and its people. Yeats' heart lies more firmly, he is implying, with the old stories of his motherland than with the

old stories of the continental Europeans. The modern world is far more organized, more structured than this past of natural beauty and individual freedom. Though he draws inspiration from those foreign stories and obviously holds respect for them, he does not cherish them as dearly as that Druid land and Druid tune that he mentions in the poem. The “red-rose-bordered hem” Yeats mentioned is also clearly a further reference to the Rose that is Ireland. He believes that these stories and these faery creatures still live in the hearts of the people, that the mysticism of old Ireland has not left entirely. The poem closes with a heartfelt message to his reader about his purpose in writing, as well as his hope that one day people will look back on his work and know what he tried to do for Ireland. He says, “While still I may, I write for you / The love I lived, the dream I knew . . . I cast my heart into my rhymes, / That you, in the dim coming times, / May know how my heart went with them / After the red-rose-bordered hem” (33-48). Though *To Ireland in the Coming Times* is rich with imagery of the eternal nature of Ireland, her long history, and the magical creatures that still flit between the minds of Yeats and his fellows, it is first and foremost an attempt to draw the reader into a similar sort of nationalism. Through his recognizable passion and knowledge of Ireland, Yeats’ appeal to his reader is both genuine and clear.

*The Rose* was, in general, Yeats’ attempt to make his poetry relevant to the nationalist movement in Ireland. In the poems that frame the collection, as well as the plainly Irish subject matter of the middle pieces, Yeats blends his love of Ireland with what he believes it is to be Irish. Nationalism in Ireland was a highly political movement at the time, and Yeats had always sought to distance himself from such connections, further alienating himself from the movers and shakers of the attempts at change. However, the revolutionary figure John O’Leary had given Yeats his reasons behind his nationalism in these early years. O’Leary had a strong sense of what

it was at the time to be, according to O'Leary himself, truly Irish. O'Leary believed that, “. . . he should feel first of all that he was an Irishman; second, that Irish unity must be secured, and finally, that he should make some sacrifice for Ireland. These simple, unpolitical precepts . . . had considerable effect upon Yeats, who up to that time had thought of the nationalist movement as an affair for politicians” (Ellmann 46). It is clear through Yeats' poetry that his nationalist love for Ireland was not purely political in nature, if even political at all. His focus more heavily leaned towards the mystical aspects of Ireland: the stories, the songs, the folk-centered aspects of his country rather than the modern problems plaguing the modern people. This love of folklore was not necessarily shared by contemporary nationalists, though, and so *The Rose* holds an important place in Yeats' attempt to stir up a nationalist fervor among the artistic movements of Ireland. Because he was not accepted in many more political circles during his time, he has been described as “. . . a man in frenzy, beating on every door in the hotel in an attempt to find his own room” (Ellmann, 70). Simply put, he was a man without a place. Nonetheless, he persevered through this period, and he stuck closely to the teachings and ideas that O'Leary had instilled in him in his younger years. He later wrote that about the influence of O'Leary and O'Leary's compatriots and the conversations they had together in his later years when he states, “these debates, from O'Leary's conversation, or from the Irish books he lent or gave me has come all I have set my hand to since.” (“Autobiographies”, 101). Yeats saw the unity of the Irish and a true sense of Irishness only being able to be secured through a revival of the culture of Ireland from its mystical, pre-Christian, pre-English roots. This is a sense that would only continue as he grew as a poet, and he would seek to refine his technique as he went.

### **The Search for Ireland: *The Wind Among the Reeds***

In 1899's collection titled, *The Wind Among the Reeds*, Yeats found himself once again utilizing the topic of the wandering hero. Much like *The Wanderings of Oisín*, *The Song of Wandering Aengus* depicts a hero who is lost, searching for years for the source of his heart's passion. As before, Yeats chose a distinctly Irish character in Aengus, whom Yeats described as, "The god of youth, beauty, and poetry . . ." (Finneran, 480). In this poem, Aengus meets a beautiful young woman who he immediately falls in love with, vowing to search for her until the end of his days when she flees from him. Appealing to Yeats' sense of nationalism, the young woman most probably represents Ireland in a physical sense: a beautiful, fleeting idea that Yeats himself searched for in his numerous attempts at instilling a sense of Irishness into his art. The first implication of this is in the fishing rod Aengus catches the mystical girl in being made out of hazel. The first stanza of the poem says, "I went out to the hazel wood, / Because a fire was in my head, / And cut and peeled a hazel wand" (1-3). Yeats would later explain this image in greater detail, saying that, "The hazel tree was the Irish tree of Life or of Knowledge, and in Ireland it was doubtless, as elsewhere, the tree of the heavens" (Finneran, 481). When the fish Aengus catches turns into a beautiful young woman, the mystical aspects of the story flair to life, and the implications of the greater symbolism of the girl become more apparent. Much like Yeats, Aengus searches for this faerie woman for many long years, and in the poem he never actually reunites with the lady. He says, "Though I am old with wandering / Through hollow lands and hilly lands / I will find where she has gone . . . And pluck till time and times are done / The silver apples of the moon, / The golden apples of the sun" (17-24). It is a poem about longing, not one about a love that has been realized. Though Aengus feels the love for her in his heart, it can never be fully realized until the young woman is in his arms; such is Yeats' fervor

for Ireland. Through the mask of Aengus, Yeats shows the reader the longing that he feels within himself for a brighter future for Ireland. The symbolism of the golden apples is the implication of eternity, an unending renaissance for Ireland once the people find her once again, and the silver representing the malleability and brilliance of something yet unshaped. He loves Ireland, and yearns for others to love her, but the love he feels cannot be reciprocated and returned in full until Ireland has been allowed a revival of the past, of the glory days of their history and heritage.

Following Romantic roots, Yeats continued his examination of Ireland as a beautiful woman in another poem from the same collection, *He Remembers forgotten Beauty*. The woman in the poem is most likely Yeats' long-time love interest Maud Gonne, whom Yeats refers to often in his poetry, especially where matters of Ireland's long-lost beauty are concerned. A member of the more militant branches of the nationalist movement, Maud Gonne represented for Yeats the faerie beauty of Ireland that had fallen away in recent generations. His distaste with the modern state of things in Ireland is apparent, as the opening lines of the poem are, "When my arms wrap you round I press / My heart upon the loveliness / That has long faded from the world" (1-3). He believed that Ireland had been left bereft of beauty, and so that was what made Maud Gonne so attracting for him; she represented everything he loved about Ireland's past. His nationalist sentiments spring forward in the poem quite strongly when he continues in his musings about Ireland's past, especially referring to what has been done to the artifacts left over from her long history. He says, "The love-tales wrought with silken thread / By dreaming ladies upon cloth / That has made fat the murderous moth" (6-8). The "murderous moth" being referred to here is most probably England, who made a point of leeching all resources, riches, and power away from Ireland for so many generations, it would indeed be akin to a moth gnawing away at a

woven tapestry. Yeats is implying here that though the tapestries of old Ireland remain, they are in dire need of repair, hence why they cannot be so easily and readily recovered; England has had its fill off of the Irishry. Yeats once more refers to Maud's beauty, and in the same sense Ireland's former beauty, when he says, "Through many a sacred corridor / Where such grey clouds of incense rose / That only God's eyes did not close: / For that pale breast and lingering hand / Come from a more dream-heavy land, / A more dream-heavy hour than this" (12-17).

Once more Yeats refers to the dreamlike qualities of Irish mysticism, filled with incense and holy halls, saying once more that such beauties as Maud Gonne have not existed since ancient times before Ireland was infringed upon. Yeats closes the poem by referring to "Beauty" as a personified individual, saying that, ". . . when you sigh from kiss to kiss / I hear white Beauty sighing, too . . . But flame on flame, and deep on deep, / Throne over throne where in half sleep, / Their swords upon their iron knees, / Brood her high lonely mysteries" (18-24). Here again Yeats assumes the role of a masked individual. On the surface he is proclaiming his love for Maud Gonne, yet on a deeper level he is talking about the mourning of the passage of a revered figure, namely Ireland. Yeats wants Maud Gonne's dream of a new Ireland to come true, as he shares the same dream, though their means are far different. His image of Ireland as a personified woman allows him to maintain a dignified image of her passing through the ages, as well as properly convey the tragedy that he sees as befalling her.

During this time Yeats seemed to be primarily concerned with what Ireland *could* become. His Romantic idea of referring to Ireland as a beautiful faerie woman was effective in embodying what he saw her potential to be: perfection of form, a timeless beauty rooted in the mysticisms of old. Ireland's perfection was fleeting to him, and he did not feel as though he could yet grasp it, though he searched for it for many, many years, as implied by *The Song of*

*Wandering Aengus*. In many ways Aengus was simply Yeats himself, a romantic lover of ideas, as well as people, who lusted after a woman in his dreams until he was old and weak, well past the vibrant days of his youth. He has travelled through Ireland and seen what it has become, and has become dispirited with what he knew his modern Ireland was like. However, he never gave up hope for the future, and although both poems in *The Wind Among the Reeds* leave off on uncertain notes, that uncertainty held a clarity of purpose behind it. Simply because Yeats did not know if he would succeed did not mean that he would stop trying.

**The Later Yeats: *To a Wealthy Man . . .* and *Under Ben Bulbin***

Yeats' *To a Wealthy Man . . .* (1914) echoed the younger Yeats' enthusiastic nationalistic sentiment, however it lacked one thing in particular: a distinct sense of Irishness. However, the lack of Irish figures, whether mythological or historical, does little to take away the sense of nationalism that Yeats builds in this poem. He has been yearning for a Celtic renaissance of sorts, and so instead of calling on his more familiar images, he instead invokes the great patrons of the Italian Renaissance to drive home his purpose. Written after a Lord Ardilaun decided to withhold funds from the Dublin Municipal Gallery, as well as a number of other events he disliked, Yeats channeled his frustration towards pointing out why, in his mind, such frugality with regards to the arts would not allow for Ireland to grow. Yeats felt that these events would do irreparable harm to the state of the display of the arts and artistry of Ireland, that there would be no place to find artistic wisdom and grace if places like the Gallery did not receive proper funding. He says, "These controversies, political, literary, and artistic, have showed that neither religion nor politics can of itself create minds with enough receptivity to become wise, or just and generous enough to make a nation." (Finneran, 458). Yeats was, as always, quite concerned with the artistic renaissance he wanted for Ireland. In *To a Wealthy Man . . .*, Yeats responds

early to the refusal of funds to the arts. He says, “You gave but will not give again / Until enough of Paudeen’s pence / By Biddy’s halfpennies have lain / To be ‘some sort of evidence,’ / Before you’ll put your guineas down” (1-5). He alludes to the Lord Ardilaun seeking the opinion of the lower-class folk and the philistines, who would obviously not seek to spend their funds on art when their livelihoods are more directly at stake on a day-to-day basis. Yeats continues by naming off a number of famed artistic patrons and creators, all of whom were known for their incredible contributions to culture and learning, who did not ask for the opinion of the common folk. He names Duke Ercole of Ferrara of Castiglione’s The Courtier for his comedies, Duke Guidobaldo di Montefeltro of Urbino for his schools of grammar and courtesy, and Cosimo de’ Medici for funding the National Library of St Mark’s (Finneran, 485-486). Although even these named people’s native Italy was in dire conflict, Yeats argued that in the long-term their contributions were of great weight because they gave the people a place to “Delight in Art whose end is peace, / In logic and in natural law” (26-27). Yeats’ pleas in this poem are a testament to his nationalistic fervor. He wants the revolution of Irish culture to happen in people’s minds and artistic inspiration rather than in violence in the streets and political debates. He says that in order for this Celtic renaissance to be accomplished, one must, “Look up in the sun’s eye and give / What the exultant heart calls good / That some new day may breed the best / Because you gave, not what they would / But the right twigs for an eagle’s nest!” (32-36). Yeats is suggesting that, with regards to art, it is better to build for the future even though there will be minimal immediate returns than to forgo the expense and as a result be left completely artistically destitute when times are better and people yearn for culture and a sense of place.

Published in the *New Poems* collection in 1938, *Under Ben Bulbin* was one of the last poems ever published by Yeats, and it serves as a sort of epigraph to his ideals he had put forth

over the years. He contemplates the impermanence of life itself, yet he also considers what can endure through art and the responsibilities one has within art. In the fourth part of *Under Ben Bulbin*, Yeats directly addresses the modern Irish poet, drawing a path from Michelangelo to what he sees, as always, as a present that does not live up to his standards. He says, “Michael Angelo left a proof / On the Sistine Chapel roof, / Where but half-awakened Adam / Can disturb globe-trotting Madam / ‘Till her bowels are in heat” (45-49). According to Yeats, in the older days of the Italian Renaissance art had tremendous power, and those who practiced their craft had such force because they made art for the people, to show them a purpose. However, Yeats does not believe that to be the case anymore. He claims, “Gyres run on; / When that greater dream had gone / Calvert and Wilson, Blake and Claude / Prepared a rest for the people of God, / Palmer’s phrase, but after that / Confusion fell upon our thought” (62-67). This confusion, Yeats implies, is what has resulted in a lack of ability on the part of his people to create for themselves another Renaissance. But he does not believe that the future is without hope. In *Under Ben Bulbin* Yeats gives one further plea to the artists of the future, specifically those of Irish origin, so that they may bring about that Celtic Renaissance. He says, “Irish poets learn your trade / Sing whatever is well made, / Scorn the sort now growing up . All out of shape from toe to top, / Their unremembering hearts and heads / Base-born products of base beds” (68-73). Yeats urges the future poets of Ireland to find the same passion he did in older, more Irish ways, to embody the nationalistic sentiment in their art rather than trying to reshape the Irish to conform to a more English norm. Yeats wishes for Irish literature to become rooted in the island’s past, and so he begs his reader to learn the Irish songs as he did, and retell the old stories. He urges, “Cast your mind on other days / That we in coming days may be / Still the indomitable Irishry” (81-83). Yeats clearly believed that if he could urge but a few Irish poets to embody the same love for

Ireland that he felt, that his dream of a new Irish literary and cultural movement would take place at last.

In his later years, Yeats was still concerned with what Ireland could become, and his own purpose had not been dulled; yet, his new focus seemed to be one what Ireland was at the time, and the disappointment that this knowledge brought Yeats. Though hopeful as always, Yeats was obviously distressed by the way the members of the Irish population who had money and influence were spending their funds and energy. He wanted investments into Ireland's cultural and artistic future, not towards more political or temporary gains. He clearly thought that the Irish sense of art was degrading, and had been degrading for quite some time. This seemed to be the focal point in these later years: the idea of the Celtic Renaissance that he had mused on for so long. This, he thought in the aforementioned poems, was the solution to stirring up a new and energetic nationalism in the hearts and minds of the common people and the upper classes alike. These methods would be the way that a new Irish literature would arise.

### **Conclusions**

By maintaining his devotion to beauty and to the ideas of a new Irish literature while abandoning much of the excess romanticism that would have mired his work in abstract symbolism and esoterics, Yeats was able to present a clear and vivid image of what he believed Irish literature and culture should become. His attention to form and style, along with his ability to parallel many of the great Irish heroes alongside more well-known myths of the time helped to familiarize his audience with the Ireland of old, the Druidic Ireland when the English held no sway over the island. He set out to establish a collection of Irish poetry that was based in Ireland, made for the Irish themselves, and he accomplished that goal. With a broad spectrum of figures and topics giving Yeats a wellspring of inspiration and knowledge, his sense of nationalism

blended perfectly with his imagery of a bygone era. He was the heir to the Romantic tradition, but he did not stick too closely to his Romantic sensibilities, instead seeking a more practical approach, and in the end this is what truly let his messages shine through.

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