

## Mythological Themes and Motives in William Butler Yeats' Poetry

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**Abstract:** *The purpose of this work is to identify the patterns of mythology, its system, language, and material - in modern times, in modern literary creativity, outside the conditions that existed in the era of pre-logical thinking. Yeats's work as a subject of such consideration is especially indicative. Firstly, even against the background of special attention to the symbolism that existed at the turn of the century, Yeats stands out as one of the brightest myth-makers, and secondly, his poetry can be considered a transitional phenomenon between traditional and modern poetry, which makes it possible to study some of the features of both directions.*

**Keywords:** *modern poetry mythology, mysticism, analyses interpretation of symbols in poetry.*

**Introduction.** Throughout the developed human society, mythology has played a huge role. Each nation had its own myths about the creation of the world and man, as well as about gods and heroes - poetic, naive, and often incredibly bizarre. Mythology is the main way of understanding the world. A man from the earliest times had to comprehend the world around him. Mythology acts as the earliest form of world perception, man understands of the world and himself, as the original form of the spiritual culture of mankind.

Until the XVIII century, only ancient myths - Greek and Roman - were most common in Europe. In the first half of the XVIII century, the myths of a wide range of Indo-European peoples (ancient Indians, Iranians, Germans, Slavs) were introduced into scientific circulation. The subsequent identification of the myths of the peoples of America, Africa, Oceania, and Australia showed that mythology at a certain stage of historical development existed among almost all the peoples of the world. The scientific approach to the study of "world religions" (Christianity, Islam, Buddhism) has shown that they, too, are "filled" with myths. But, although the content of myths in all peoples is approximately the same, they all have some of their own, individual features and characteristics.

**Literature review.** The phenomenon of the author's mythopoetic space belongs precisely to the XX century, while it arose approximately at the same time in different, from the point of view of ethnology, literature. Thus, the mythopoetic space as a phenomenon is supranational and belongs to the history of developed literature, and not to the history of peoples or productive forces.

Recently, the work of W.B. Yeats also began to receive quite close attention from literary critics. But the works of such authors as V.A. Ryapolov ("The Abbey Theatre: W.B. Yeats and Sean O'Casey: a dramatic chronicle"), G.M. Kruzhev ("Nostalgia of obelisks. Literary dreams."), A.P. Sarukhanyan ("W. B. Yeats and J. Joyce. Mythology and Mythologism as a way of understanding the world"), D. Khorolsky are devoted primarily to Yeats's dramaturgy, while little has been written about Yeats the myth-maker. In foreign literary criticism, the number of

mythological sources of Yeats' work is more extensive. The significance of mythology in Yeats' work is emphasized in the works of D.J. Hoffman (Barbarous knowledge: myth in the poetry of Yeats), M.X. Tuente (W.B. Yeats and Irish folklore), B. Kox (W.B. Yeats, the tragic phase: a study of the last poems), D. Albright (The myth against myth: a study of Yeats's imagination in old age), S.P. Alderson (W.B. Yeats & the tribe of Danu: three views of Ireland's fairies), X. Bloom, M.K. Flannery (Yeats and magic: the earlier works), A.P. Grossman (Poetic knowledge in the early Yeats), K. Raine (Yeats the initiate: the essays on certain themes in the work of W.B. Yeats).

Among these monographs, Daniel Albright's book "The myth against myth: a study of Yeats's imagination in old age" explores Yeats' depiction of human consciousness, and the poet's careful study of his own individuality through poetry should be highlighted. To some extent, Yeats tried to translate his personal image directly into an objective, verbal image.

**Research methods.** According to the researcher, the method used by Yeats to describe the formation of his spiritual world has nothing to do with autobiography. A simple accident in his case is absolutely inappropriate - Yeats experienced a strong rejection of art as a mirror image of the surrounding reality. The true autobiography, according to Albright, is the book "Vision", during the writing of which the poet tried to determine the place of his own personality within the framework of human history. This book, according to Yeats, was supposed to encourage Western civilizations to write their own autobiography.

Of the Russian-language works, the article by A.P. Sarukhanyan should be mentioned. "W.B. Yeats and J. Joyce. Mythology and mythologism as a way of understanding the world", published in 1997 in the collection "Irish literature of the XX century: a view from Russia". It explores the work of Yeats and Joyce from the point of view of the mythological space of Ireland. Most of the section on Yeats is devoted to a cycle of plays about Cuchulainn, one of the central characters of the Celtic epic, as well as mythological plots in some of the poet's poems.

The purpose of this work is to study the ways of using mythological images and plots, as well as the phenomenon of creating their own mythology by two of the most famous authors of the twentieth century, John Ronald Reuel Tolkien and William Butler Yeats, to consider the main stages of Tolkien's creation of "mythology for England", namely the writing of the novel "The Silmarillion", a cycle of legends, ranging from the global myth of the Song of Creation, which gained visible existence, to the biographies of individual heroes of the world called Arda, and the creation by Yeats of his mythological system, based primarily on ancient Irish folklore and Celtic mythology.

**Discussions.** William Butler Yeats turned to Celtic mythology and ancient Irish folklore, forming the heroic concept of national history. Irish myths seemed to the poet a life-giving source capable of enriching modern literature, "giving a new age the most significant symbols." He believed that in none of the European literature did national mythology, which also continues to live in the minds of the people, play such a decisive role as in Ireland. Moreover, he was sure that Western culture takes its origins in Gaelic mythology, through it penetrating into the religious cults of ancient Egypt and Greece, and even deeper into the primitive myths of India. That is why it seemed possible to him to create on its basis a universal religion that would return to Ireland and the entire Western world the moral and social values forgotten by him. Turning to Gaelic myths, Yeats satisfied the two deepest needs of his nature - the desire for the heroic and the craving for the supernatural, which constitute the very essence of the poet, a kind of spiritual basis for his work.

Even Yeats' prose is poetic, mythological, and deeply symbolic. As in poetry, in his prose works and plays, he widely uses the motifs of Celtic legends and Druidic mythologemes. So, for

example, the story of the village teacher and poet Red Hanrakhan is a symbolic path of a man doomed to eternal wandering and eternal restlessness, this is the hope of Ireland and the path to its revival. Turning to mythology, Yeats tried to awaken in his readers a sense of belonging to a single people and a consciousness of responsibility for their destinies.

Yeats' symbols are bridges between the real world and the world of ideas, between flesh and spirit, and between life and death. Its symbolism is multifaceted, multilayered, sometimes philosophical, sometimes lyrical, and sometimes ironic. Symbols form patterns, and flow into each other. As Jack Lindsay wrote, the purpose of Yeats's work was "to bring mythical images to life by relating them to modern life and its affairs." Yeats himself saw in the symbolism of myth a comprehensive embodiment of the unconscious element, more meaningful than all the tricks of rationalism and positivism.

Yeats entered poetry at the end of romanticism, which was going through its "Hellenistic", myth-making period. He is close not so much to the narrative tradition of Wordsworth as to the philosophical and symbolic tradition, coming from Coleridge and Shelley. Or rather, from the great poetry of Aeschylus, Dante, Shakespeare, and Milton, poets-thinkers who turned to grandiose symbolic generalizations-symbols of being. Although Yeats called himself the last romantic, like Shelley, he went beyond romanticism, rushing towards symbolic myth-making.

**Analysis and results.** Yeats was engaged in numerous esoteric practices: he performed ceremonial magic, studied Hindu philosophy and meditation, and as a young man interviewed rural Irish elders about their experiences in the uncanny realm of faery. Yeats was keen to replace traditional Greek and Roman mythological figures with figures from Irish folklore. The juxtaposition of the past and the present, the spiritual and the physical, and many such dissimilar concepts and his condensed rich language make his poetry obscure. In *Sailing To Byzantium*, he describes the cryptic realm of spirits for which he so fervently searched.

Before me floats an image, man or shade,  
Shade more than man, more image than a shade;  
For Hades bobbin bound in mummy-cloth  
May unwind the winding path

The mystical and invisible dimensions of life and consciousness fascinated Yeats. He was not convinced by the teachings of dogmatic Christianity, nor was he satisfied by his father's insistently skeptical outlook on matters spiritual. Rejecting these two contraries, Yeats pursued his spiritual yearnings in the ancient yet experimental Western esoteric tradition:

"But seek alone to hear the strange things said  
By God to the bright hearts of those long dead,  
And learn to chant a tongue men do not know."

Being disillusioned by lack of harmony and strength in modern culture, Yeats tried to revive the ancient spells and chant to bring unity and a spirit of integration in modern civilization torn by conflicts and dissensions. Yeats was not content to merely read about or profess belief in a divine reality. He wanted nothing less than gnosis, knowledge and insight of this hyper-real dimension culled from direct, trance-like experiences of super-sensory, subtle realms of consciousness.

This pursuit of unorthodox and bizarre forms of knowledge not only piqued Yeats' curiosity about the nature of life and the depths of the mind, but also provided him with an abundance of potent ideas and images for many of his poems. *Byzantium* evokes a world of phantasmagoric rapture and revelation.

Dying into a dance,  
An agony of trance,  
An agony of flame that cannot singe a sleeve.  
Astraddle on the dolphin's mire and blood,  
Spirit after spirit! The smithies break the flood,

In a nut-shell, Yeats "possesses an imaginative mysticism, an essential attribute of Celticism, he has the ability to efface the outlines of material objects in a dreamy mistiness."

**Conclusion.** Yeats created his mythology to defy the flow of time, orienting his mythological images towards infinity. In his tragic vision, people give all the time. The main problem of his works is the question of a person's attitude to this loss: defiant defiance, or passive acceptance. Things in themselves are not important; they only become important when they become a symbol of a challenge to the passage of time. Based on the national folklore tradition, Yeats created a unique mythological system in which he places the characters of the folk epic in ordinary human circumstances.

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