

ييتس : إحياء المسرح الشعري في القرن العشرين

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المستخلص:

يحظى شعر وليام بتلر ييتس أو دبليو بي ييتس بتحليل ودراسات كثيرة لكن لم تعطى مسرحياته الاهتمام المناسب. هذه الدراسة تهدف الى تسليط الضوء على طريقة نجاح ييتس في كتابة مسرحيات شعرية في عصر النثر. الدراسة أعدت لتسهم في اثراء مجال الدراسة كنتيجة للندرة في الابحاث الحديثة في هذا النطاق. تبدأ الدراسة بمقدمة عن مفهوم المسرح الشعري، يتبع ذلك دراسة تحليلية لمسرحيات دبليو بي ييتس كأحد المسرحيين البارزين في القرن العشرين. وتهدف الى اثبات اسهاماته وتأثيراته في اعادة احياء المسرح الشعري في القرن العشرين، كأحد البارزين مثل تي اس إليوت، من خلال تطرق خاص الى مسرحيتي، «ارض أمنية القلب» و«الكونتيسة كاثلين»، اضافة الى الاشارة الموجزة عن عدد من مسرحيات ييتس كأهمية.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

دبليو بي ييتس، المسرح الشعري، إعادة إحياء، مسرحيات، أدب، القرن العشرين.



Yeats: Resurgence of Poetic Drama in the Twentieth Century

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تاريخ الإجازة: ١٤٣٦/٤/٣٠

تاريخ التحكيم: ١٤٣٦/٤/٦

Abstract

The poetry of William Butler Yeats has been so much studied and analyzed but his dramas in verse are paid less effort. This study aims to shed light on the way Yeats thrived in writing poetic dramas in the age of prose. It is arranged to contribute in enriching the field of study because of the lack to sufficient recent researches in this area. The study starts with an introduction on poetic drama then an analytical examination of the plays of a major twentieth century poet and dramatist, W. B. Yeats. It aims to demonstrate his contribution and influence of the revival of poetic drama in the twentieth century, a pioneer as an eminent as T. S. Eliot, with special reference to The Land of

Heart's Desire, and The Countess Cathleen, also, indication reference to some other of Yeats' plays is important.

Key Words:

W. B. Yeats, poetic drama, revival, literature, plays, twentieth century.

Introduction

The term ‘drama’ is sprung from the Greek verb ‘*dran*’, which refers to action. It is a mode of illustration which depends on verbal expression and gesticulation of some performers. Drama has echoed the customs, manners, and general life since its early stages more than five thousand years ago. It has had a significant communal purpose and impact. “It is the most sophisticated and most simple way of recording human endeavor. Its purpose is both to entertain and to instruct” (The World Book Encyclopedia: Volume IV 1955, p. 2078). Drama was brought into being by poets of the prehistoric world as one of the first mythical methods.

Drama has betrothed the consideration of literary critics, actors, and huge number of those concerned with dramaturgy. It imitates the consciousness of people and those concerned with its manufacturing. It symbolizes life in all its magnificence and despair. Drama has various objectives such as social, political, religious and it appeals to diverse societies for multiple reasons. “It is so deeply associated with and dependent upon the whole material world of the theatre, with its thronging crowds and its universal appeal; it lies so near to the deeper consciousness of the nation in which it takes its rise” (Allardyce, 1969, p. 9).

Poetic drama avails itself through verse as its medium. It aims at expressing a condition of existence in a given

period of time and space. The human mind with its moods and passions can express itself in verse more commendably than in prose. Eliot, in his critical essay ‘The Social Function of Poetry’, points out that “Emotion and feeling... can only be fully expressed in the vernacular language which a particular people has fashioned for itself through many generations, ... it is poetry than prose, which is concerned with the analysis and definition of emotion and feeling” (Russel, Nye. 1963, p. 303).

Meaningful verse dramas on the stage has the ability to make the addressees less conscious of listening to pure poetry, and also can make the audiences participate in the experience of the characters involved. This is because the sublime human emotions can best be expressed more accurately in verse. Critics of poetic drama have emphasized that poetic drama deals with the essence of life. Poetic drama is capable of expressing the voice of the soul, of thrilling the heart and liberating the soul as it motivates the imagination of the audience. Prose drama does not produce this kind of impact on the audience. Several critics believe that the normal medium for drama is poetry. Poetry enhances drama with the musical influence that stimulates the audience. It is almost agreed that there are three major categories of poetry such as the dramatic, the epic, and the lyric. Any other kind is, either, derived from these three or is subordinate to them or even formed from combinations of them all.

Poetic drama means much more than only a play. In

prose drama, the significance is external. But the inner significance and importance of poetic drama is tangibly felt. Poetic drama is supposed to bind greater power to express moods, moments, and feelings more than prose drama. Therefore, poetry and drama are not two isolated elements. They create one body. Drama is integral to verse and poetry turns toward drama. From this point of view, drama and poetry are fused together. Thereby, drama and poetry are intimately associated together as a dramatic work can be considered from “a double point of view, how far it is poetical, and how far it is theatrical. The two are by no means inseparable” (Schlegel, 1809, p. 31). As well as the “poetic volumes of *The Shadowy Waters* is a further indication that the absolute separation of the two literary forms [poetry and drama] is finally not possible for Yeats” (Howes, Elizabeth Marjorie and John Kelly. 2006, p. 106). In addition, “Yeats’s career as a playwright, ... is inseparable from his career as a poet” (Loizeaux, Elizabeth Bergmann. 2003, p. 88).

As such, in a poetic play the audience comes to appreciate the meaning of poetry and also the musical harmony that strengthens the passionate impression of the sight. A poetic drama is thus as worldwide and natural as music. It affords greater pleasure than prose drama; the spectator of a verse play will enjoy at least, two things - first, a story with its plot, events and action, and secondly, the sense of poetry, music, and rhythm. Consequently, a good poetic drama presumes a kind of poetic vocalization

that is both theatrical and reasonable for the action it provokes. In a poetic drama, poetry and action are made integral to each other. They are not brought together randomly but they are indistinguishable.

An enjoyable verse play needs to have two things: a rhythm and the power to express individual character. In a poetic drama the words in verse have potentially a richer meaning than those used in prose drama. Coleridge, in *Biographia Literaria*, confirms that the nature of poetic expression and its depth can be better achieved in verse than in prose. Some prose plays are more limited in their depth and intensity of expression than verse plays because poetry will greatly intensify the expression. A poetic drama has enough flexibility to convey whatever and is much more 'transparent' than the prose drama. Intrinsically, verse is suitable compound to prose as dramatic language because verse can provide better opportunities for the interplay of action, emotion, and mood.

The dramatic verse differs from other ordinary verse. In a poetic play, verse constitutes the third voice of poetry, in which the poet is "saying, not what he would say in his own person, but only what he can say within the limits of one imaginary character addressing another imaginary character" (Eliot, T. S. 2000, p. 80). William Skaff, in 'The Poetic Drama and the Dramatic Poem', defines poetic drama saying that "poetry expresses the most intense emotion only with a dramatic situation consisting of a persona whose identity is separate from the author's, and who addresses

other characters and an audience according to particular circumstances dictated by plot action” (Skaff, William. 1986, p. 104). “William Butler Yeats was born in the Dublin suburb of Sandymount on 13 June 1865” (Black, Joseph. et al. 2008, p. 1140). He is an eminent poet and a playwright and was interested in the revival of poetic drama to make the theatre a real place for the liberation of imagination for the audience of the twentieth century.

Yeats developed new theories of poetic drama and its performance that quickly began to affect both his plays and lyrics. He hated the “realistic” theatrical traditions established by such playwrights as Henrik Ibsen and Bernard Shaw: these put too much stress on the merely material world. Instead, he sought to synthesize drama’s customary emphasis on action and conflict with modes of visual and verbal minimalism intended to produce visionary theatrical experiences. (Holdeman, David. 2006, p. 46).

In his pursuit of poetic drama, Yeats castigated the public and commercial theatres. He felt that if poetic drama had to succeed in modern age, poet-playwrights would have to find a new type of theatre which would not be commercial but a new literary space entirely for themselves. Then, the poet-dramatists would be able to create and develop their aims without any interference from the ‘vulgar’ and the commonplace. For such ideas, Yeats commented saying:

We must simplify acting, especially in poetical drama,

and in prose drama that is remote from real life like my Hour-Glass. We must get rid of everything that is restless, everything that draws the attention away from the sound of the voice, or from the few moments of intense expression, whether that expression is through the voice or through the hands (FitzGerald, Mary and Richard J. Finneran. 2003, p. 27).

As a result, Yeats, along with some of his enthusiastic close friends, founded the Abbey Theatre, which was once called The Irish Literary Theatre. It “rapidly became a focus of the Irish Revival” (Drabble, Margaret. 2000, p. 2). Additionally,

The Abbey Theatre in Dublin has played a patent role in the revival of poetic drama in Ireland in the first half of the twentieth century. W. B. Yeats greatly contributed to the foundation of the Abbey Theatre with a support and assistance by Lady Gregory. Yeats, Martyn, and Lady Gregory spent much of ... summer planning the venture they initially christened the Irish Literary Theatre. Lady Gregory saw the project as a chance to do important work for her country while fulfilling her own ambitions. In Yeats she saw a talented young man who desperately needed her help (Holdeman, David. 2006, p. 37).

Lady Gregory was a playwright who supplied much of the dialogue of W. B. Yeats’s *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*. She wrote plays such as *Devorgilla* and *The White Cockade*. Another figure who has helped in constructing the Abbey

Theatre was an English lady, Miss Annie Horniman. Though the Irish drama at the beginning of the twentieth century was obviously a new extension of the English drama, it preserved its themes and atmosphere as Irish. The plays performed in the Abbey Theatre are characterized as Celtic and fashioned in the fairy-world. Yeats “turned to fairy tales and other antirealistic forms to bring poetry and spiritual meaning back into the theatre” (Zipes, Jack. 2000, p. 139).

The verse bears marks of imaginative vitality. Poetic drama proved popular in the Abbey Theatre whereas prose drama, which was written by dramatists such as Shaw, Arthur Pinero and Henry Arthur Jones, was influential in London’s theatres. K. S. Misra remarks that the theatre in Ireland had a real advantage over the theatre in England. This advantage is the opulent creation and cultivation of poetic plays by its practitioners such as W. B. Yeats.

William Butler Yeats — Ireland’s greatest poet and arguably, ... the foremost poet of the English language in the twentieth century— employed the phrase ‘the Celtic Twilight’ as the title of his book of Irish folklore published in 1893, using it to describe the literary and artistic mood in Ireland ..., a romantic mood of shadowy mysticism and mournfulness (Sternlicht, . 2010, p. 12).

W. B. Yeats is an eminent pioneer in the field of poetic drama who has played an important role in its revival at the beginning of the previous century. He was both a

practitioner of drama and a theorist. “In his own drama, Yeats sought to recover the earlier verbal energies of the English language and the poetry of the carnivalesque” (Luckhurst, 2006, p. 25). In addition, the “Yeatsian drama was not just an important alternative tradition in modern theatre but represented more fully ... the fundamental framework of world drama as it flourished in Greece in the fifth century” (Howes, Elizabeth Marjorie and John Kelly. 2006, p. 105). He has endeavored, through large body of his critical essays, reviews, and introductions, to make the stage an arena of excitement, intellectual joy and a place of liberation. “Eliot himself acknowledged the contribution made by Yeats in the sphere of poetic drama, for it was due to him that the idea of the poetic drama was kept alive when everywhere else it had been driven underground” (Chaturvedi, B. N. 1963, p. 52).

In one of his essays, ‘The Tragic Theatre’ (1910) Yeats depicts prose drama as a fancy of mundane existence. Prose drama is different from poetic drama where poetry escapes the bounds of place and time. Therefore, Yeats grew up experimenting with verse plays opposing prose drama in the Abbey Theatre. His plays “demonstrate his genius as a poetic dramatist” (Rosenthal, M. L. 1996, p. xlii). Through the long time he spent in writing verse plays, he was eager to cultivate it to be used in place of the popular prose drama.

One of the biggest challenges that Yeats endeavored to achieve was that of creating poetic drama that is different from that of the nineteenth century and earlier. The poetic

plays of the nineteenth century were nearer to the blank verse of the Elizabethan age. He desired to avoid the over use of iambic but he used some alliteration. He aspired to use sort poetry that is dramatic because it creates opportunities for the expression of a full range of emotions. Yeats realized that a successful dramatist in the modern age needs to use the elasticity and spontaneity of the spoken language, and this language must be gracious enough to affect the hearer, as the same as poetry attains. The verse used in drama needs to be appropriately flexible to express the pettiness of everyday talk.

W. B. Yeats wanted to write the kind of poetic drama that was meant to be tragic. In a tragedy, strong passions lead to a kind of purgation where the spectators are left with calm minds at the end of the show or after reading a play. A pure tragedy arouses strong and mighty passions and feelings. The tragic play, according to W. B. Yeats, is a passionate art because it is concerned with the consequence of the human soul against some obstacles that threaten its existence. Tragedy is influenced by archetypal figures and symbols of universal humanity. The spectators, in a tragic play, share with the protagonist the same feeling, and they undergo the same exaltation.

The dramatic works of W. B. Yeats represent his overall contribution to the revival of poetic drama in the first three decades of the twentieth century. The miscellaneous plays that he wrote measure his great efforts and will to reform and renew the Elizabethan blank verse.

He tried different ways to establish a new means of poetic drama. It is rightly observed that “by 1917 when Yeats’s efforts to create poetic drama had reached the peak, he was not writing for the Irish National theatre but for private drawing-room, and took for his model not a native but an exotic form” (Misra, K. S. 1981, p. 48).

During his long period of experimenting with drama and poetry, Yeats made a definite contribution to the development of modern poetic drama. The use of blank verse in *The Four Plays for Dancers*, a chamber poetic drama for the delight of a few” (Jeffares, Alexander Norman. 1997, p. 408), is nearly similar to the verse in the play *Deirdre*, but it is marred by the use of songs. In *Purgatory* and *The Herne’s Egg*, the use of versification is generally different from the blank verse. In many plays of Yeats, songs seem to be a kind of Psalmody. Moreover

Yeats had expressed the idea that the purpose of rhythm is ‘to keep us in that state of perhaps real trance, in which the mind liberated from the pressure of the will is unfolded in symbols’ when this liberation has been achieved, the action and the words ... can make their effect. Dance, music, masks, and costume, in addition to their parts ‘within the play, ’ prepare the audience to receive the full impact of the drama. In this respect they illuminate the theatre-form by preparing the audience to experience it in the most sensitive, will-less spirit (Donoghue, Denis. 1966, pp. 52 – 3).

The achievement of Yeats in the establishment of poetic drama for the modern stage is unique even though he does not have many followers to develop his style. He altered his method of early plays and chose some of the Noh techniques and style, which satisfied his ideal dramatic form.

Yeats believed that it is difficult to satisfy all the audiences, their tastes and dispositions. So he preferred a new form of aristocratic drama that needed sophisticated spectators to understand and encourage the use of poetry on the stage. “Yeats developed a complex theory of masks to account for human character, and in many of his own plays he returned to ancient Greek or Japanese styles of masked acting to bring out the essential role of artifice in life” (Ferber, Michael. 2007, p. 216).

Yeats’ historical significance in respect of the revival of poetic drama remains indisputable. It remains indubitable because of the size of his dramatic output, the variety of plays that he wrote, and because of the measure of success that attended his efforts to reform the old blank verse and build a new and modern measure to take its place as a medium of poetic drama in the modern age.

Yeats’ adoption of a foreign form prevented the possibility of its naturalization on the English theatre and its symbolic and allusive nature placed it beyond the comprehension of the popular audience. In this respect, Yeats presents an interesting contrast to T. S. Eliot, who

firmly endeavored to make poetic drama a source of moral and spiritual uplifting of the secular audience. Yeats “asks for an audience of no more than fifty or a hundred” (McAteer, Michael. 2010, p. 115).

The King's Threshold is one of his first plays that indicate his mastery and success over dramatic craft. It was revised several times till it reached its perfection and was fit to be staged. Yeats had acquired a good deal of poetry as such in the process of writing his plays. In *The King's Threshold*, Yeats shows that the world of poetry lovers cannot be in accordance with the emotionless majority of people. K. S. Misra asserts that “The play has the unity and concentration of classical drama, and a variety of incidents and characters, which are sharply and vividly depicted. But it is static because the central situation undergoes no dramatic development and the hero no tangible transformation, inasmuch as his ecstasy does not grow out of the action” (Misra, K. S. 1981, pp. 29–30). In this play, the poetry used is dramatic and lyrical, and it registers certain development over his previous plays. The essential metaphors and symbols are suitably woven into the play's texture, making it better than his previous play.

Deirdre is another mature and successful play of Yeats. It is a tragedy of passion. It has better characterization and more compact construction. *Deirdre* is a “retelling of an ancient Irish myth involving love and loyalty” (Felton, R. Todd. 2007, p. 3). Its importance lies in its popularity as an Irish legendary story. Deirdre is the heroine and the main

character of the play. She is so beautiful as to be equally compared with the legendary Helen.

“Among English writers, or to be more accurate, writers in English, the idealist side of Symbolism made a particular appeal to W. B. Yeats who, from his early twenties, was interested in the occult and in the world of Irish legend” (Coyle, Martin. et al. 1988, p. 305). The collection of Japanese Noh plays (1913 – 14), which Ezra Pound translated into English, satisfied W. B. Yeats’s heart and desire deeply. He decided to link the technique, symbolism and ritualistic quality of the Noh plays with the Irish mythological and legendary stories. For Yeats, Symbolism and the spiritual “residue becomes a way of conferring meaning (however terrible) or of seeking meaning. Symbolism now acts in and on the history that has complicated it along with the other constituents of lyric form” (Sherry, Vincent. 2005, p. 78).

The Noh drama is a sequence of disconnected plays liberally designed to deal with a minor number of symbolic theater followers. The Noh plays granted Yeats with three equipment, (a) an elegant store of non-verbal phrase which could unshackle the mind from the will by the formal environment of its eloquence, (b) a theatre-form of demonstrated strength, a means of unifying and of understanding his material, a way of distinguishing the natures latent in it⁴ and (c) a means of undercutting the sheer demonstration of the superficial of life. They have the ability and capability to incorporate different features of

personal experience and literary structure into a comprehensive illustration of life. The Noh collection of plays altered Yeats's thought unto artistic drama.

Besides, "In one of Yeats's last poems he remembers the themes and stories of his early poems and plays in verse, and their grand heroic characters, and recognizes that he was attracted by their appearance and not by the reality that lay behind them" (Thornley, G. C. and Roberts Gwyneth. 2003, p. 182). As a result, he intended to make his new writing indirect, symbolic, and different from his preceding plays. This kind of drama was designed to be both lyrical and mysterious. One of its principles was remoteness from life and reality. This new aspect of drama helped Yeats to proceed to a new milieu different from his first dramatic inspiration. Allardyce Nicoll sheds light on the effects of the Noh plays on Yeats, saying:

In the works of W. B. Yeats... this Japanese influence was freely acknowledged, and his plays provide an illuminating illustration of the way in which this influence produced a complete change in orientation. In his earlier writings, Yeats had been dominated almost completely by the Elizabethan style, which he sought to mould into a new shape by his lyrical imagination (Allardyce, 1973, p. 313).

Yeats became more interested in an elitist drama, which is based on ideas about the Japanese Noh drama and directed towards an audience of few chosen people. *Four Plays for Dancers* is the first play Yeats wrote after he had

been impressed by the Noh plays. In this play, Yeats has constructed verse, ritual, music and dance, in accordance with action and unity with costume and gesture. But he did not totally succeed in realizing the ideal of unity. In *Four Plays for Dancers*, his success is measured by his ability to realize the ideal of poetic drama.

The Only Jealousy of Emer, “Yeats’ deeply autobiographical play, (Wood, Michael. 2010, p. 64). is the second play in this new series. It is more complicated than the first one, but its design is better. The action of the play is a consequence to *On Baile’s Stand*, which talks about the tragic death of the protagonist, Cuchulain, “a character in several of Yeats’s early poems and plays” (Hopkins, David. 2005, p. 264), in his conflict with the waves of the sea.

In *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, the central figure is the wife Emer. She is presented with Cuchulain’s mistress, Eithne Inguba, carrying the body of the dead hero, Cuchulain, to a cottage of a fisherman. Like *Four Plays for Dancers*, the central point is the conflict between the self and the image. Brisrik, the maker of discord, has possessed the body of the hero. Sidhe, the dancer, offers her help to release the hero’s soul to life again but with a condition. This stipulation is that Emer should renounce her love to him and because Emer loves him, she agrees to the proposal and it is important for her that Cuchulain returns to life. With the new change of life, Emer feels that her soul is defeated but she considers that it is her fate which she has chosen.

The next play is *The Dreaming of the Bones*. It is the third play in this series of the Noh plays and is a static play and it lacks dramatic conflict. The orientation used in the play changes its atmosphere to become a play of thriving adaptation of the Japanese Noh tradition. The following two points present the qualities of the Japanese Noh drama. “In the Noh the central situation is often the meeting with a ghost, god, or goddess at some holy place or tomb.... b) The play also conforms to Noh convention of ‘playing upon a single metaphor’ (Misra, K. S. 1981, p. 37).

The last play of this series is *Calvary*, which tells the story of Christ on the day of his crucifixion. “Herons (or hernes) frequent Yeats’s poems and plays, notably in the brief play *Calvary*, where it may stand, mysteriously, for Christ” (Ferber, Michael. 2007, p. 97). *Calvary* is not consummately a Noh play. Yeats achieved a design his “ideas confirmed by the aristocratic, impersonal and stylized drama of the Japanese Noh plays, whose actors also wore masks and moved with carefully choreographed gestures (Stan, smith. 1990, p. 86). Irrespective of that, there are some features of Noh style, such as songs, masked actors and repetition of a single metaphor. In this ritual play, Christ sacrifices, according to the Christian religion, his life to rescue and redeem the wrong doers of the human beings.

The rest of W. B. Yeats’s plays are divided into two categories. The first division is made up of the following plays: *A Full Moon in March*, *The King of the Great Clock Tower*. These two plays were produced during the years

1933 and 1934. *The Resurrection* was produced between the years 1925 and 1930, and *The Word upon the Window Pane* was written in 1930. The vital and central element of this group of plays is that of the masked dancer.

The second division comprises the following plays: *The Herne's Egg* (1935), *Purgatory* (1938), and *The Death of Cuchulain* (1938), "was not the first Yeats wrote, but it was the only one retained for performance" (McAteer, Michael. 2010, p. 114). In this category of plays, the stress and focus is laid upon the hero's struggle and at the end, God keeps the resolution of the hero's fate. The next two plays, *The Hour Glass* and *The Player Queen* stand aside and both of them can be attributed to the first category. *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* (1902) is one of Yeats' striking plays symbolizing Ireland as a free state. He was occupied by making Ireland to be represented on the stage. He was longing for the "rediscovery of myth and legend which allowed Yeats ... to bring such figures as Cuchulain ... into [his] works as symbols and expressions of Irishness past and present" (Carter, Ronald and John McRae. 1998, p. 363). Yeats was aware of the requirement of reclaiming the stage for exemplifications of the evolving Ireland.

"Yeats is a poet almost everyone associates with violence" (Wood, Michael. 2010, p. 7). In addition, "Yeats, whose ghostly intensities ... are mixed with a disinterested enthusiasm for violence, violence largely for its own sake, succeeded brilliantly in making the dead return" (Bloom, Harold. 1997, p. 153). He was among those people who

doubted that it was the rage and frenzy of watching the play which led some men to violence and their death. In this play, the action reveals the struggle between typical causes and personal dreams. However, the play lacks sustained dramatic interest.

The Shadowy Waters (1904) is quite a long and complicated play. Its dramatic diction is weak and effeminate. It is a “verse play. The poet and his muse provide the theme for this semiautobiographical verse play. ... WBY initially wrote the work as a dramatic poem, and after giving it to some actors to speak, he was encouraged to rewrite it for the stage” (McCready, Sam. 1997, p. 352).

Yeats started to refine it after it was performed in 1904 and 1905. His aim was to avoid and cultivate its symbolic extravagance because it was too full of symbolical ideas. Yeats himself portrays this play as static and criticizes it in his letter to Arthur Symons as a play full of poetical elements, which made it useless and threadbare and over-dramatic.

The Land of Heart's Desire (1894)

The earlier plays of W. B. Yeats were refined, revised and improved many times until they were finally shaped as they are found nowadays. *The Land of Heart's Desire*, “a revolting burlesque of Irish ... religion,” (Brandon, George Saul. 1964, p. 18) expresses his youth and youthful poetry. This play indulged in the revival of the Celtic dawn. “Of all

his lyric and dramatic works the best-known is probably *The Land of Heart's Desire*, an exquisite fairy play” (Pace, Roy Bennett. 1918, p. 387). Additionally, “One folkloric motif that Yeats was preoccupied with ..., in the play *The Land of Heart's Desire*, was that of the changeling: a human person is enticed away by the fairies, who substitute one of their own in his or her place” (Arkins, Brian. 2010, p. 46).

The play “begin[s] in a peasant setting, a family conversing across the dinner table with the local Priest, little Mary Bruin newly married to the family's eldest son Shawn” (Sandberg, Stephanie Lynn. 1998, p. 52). Furthermore, it “was the first play by WBY to be produced commercially. ... The play takes place in a cottage in Sligo and shows a young newly married woman, Mary Bruin, torn between her responsibilities as a wife and her wish to escape with the fairies to the Land of Heart's Desire (McCready, Sam. 1997, p. 219).

This poetic play is diligently connected to his affection of his homeland, Ireland and the several folklores and legends that socialize there concerning leprechauns and a form of wonderland where persons were lured to cross the threshold. Fascinatingly, this was the principal play of Yeats to be executed in public, and it was operated in London for approximately a month and a half.

Mary is deeply enthralled by the anecdote of the fay Princess Edain who chases a tone to the desired land describing the place as an Aden, singing:

But I can lead you, newly-married bride,
 Where nobody gets old and crafty and wise,
 Where nobody gets old and godly and grave,
 Where nobody gets old and bitter of tongue,
 And where kind tongues bring no captivity,
 For we are only true to the far lights
 We follow singing, over valley and hill.¹

The above lines clearly confirm the poetic style used by Yeats showing grand symbols telling the reader Yeats ingenuity.

The aged characters grasp that the child is not a human being only after Father Hart has eliminated the cross. The fay now is liberated to carry out her magic charm on Mary. Mary is utterly fascinated by the song and dance of the fairy child while the peasants congregate round Father Hart in hopeless fear. Mary repents of her obstinacy but it is in vain, it is too late. According to Christianity, the priest is incapable to rescue her owing to getting rid of the cross. Mary is now lifeless only white body is left, leaving the

(1) Barrett, H. Clark. 1921. *Representative One-Act Plays by British and Irish Authors*, Boston: Little, Brown, and Company.

Shawn grieving. She moved out to an imagined Aden where:

The wind blows over the lonely of heart
And the lonely of heart is withered away,
While the faeries dance in a place apart,
Shaking their milk-white feet in a ring,
Tossing their milk-white arms in the air;
For they hear the wind laugh, and murmur and sing
Of a land where even the old are fair,
And even the wise are merry of tongue;
But I heard a reed of Coolaney say,
"When the wind has laughed and murmured and sung
The lonely of heart is withered away!" p. 381

The play deals essentially with lacking themes such as dreams, hopes and age. It involves itself with significant themes similar to hopefulness, reveries and oldness. Shawn and Mary Bruin are pair who have newlywed. The couple dwells in a small house with parents of Shawn. An elf kid enters their being. The fay is primarily received with kindness by the Bruin family. Nevertheless, it is obvious that there is something doubtful about this fairy visitor standing against Christianity. Her role is to concentrate on how life is ephemeral for mankind attempting to decoy Mary into the fairy realm where there is no death and

misery:

You shall go with me, newly-married bride, ...

Where beauty has no ebb, decay no flood,
But joy is wisdom, Time an endless song.
I kiss you and the world begins to fade. p. 387

Even though the husband, Shawn, trying his best and persuading his wife not to leave him and her house, the sprite kisses Mary, immediately she deceases in Shawn's arms thinking of life in the fay domain and unrestricted from human obligation. This drama utilizes considerably traditional legends of Irish mythology such as key motifs of growing old and elude from the loads of life.

The play is criticized as a play of womanish introspection and of little dramatic interest. It depicts the ambition and desire for immortality, “appeared ... in 1894, becoming Yeats’s first play to reach the stage and marking the first step in his lifelong quest to win a place for poetic drama in a theatrical world dominated by other modes” (Holdeman, David. 2006, p. 23). As it is mentioned earlier, the chief character is the heroine Mary, “a dreamy girl prefers her own dreams and a wandering voice of the night to the priest,” (Yeats, W. B. 2000, p. 94) who was attracted and induced by the fairy boy to be immortal. She tries to fight two inner conflicts until she becomes sick. She wants to be loyal to her family and the restrictions and traditions of her society, and at the same time, she cares for the fairy boy.

In addition, she is allured by the fascination of the fairy world where, as her mind wishes, freedom and beauty are limitless; there is only joy and happiness. Finally, she decides to desert her hearth and follow her heart searching for wisdom and endless joy, happiness and singing. But her isolated heart is shriveled with loneliness. She desired to get immortality but on the contrary, what she finds is a catastrophe because life is not just a sentiment or a dream.

The Countess Cathleen (1912)

Akin to many of Yeats's plays, *The Countess Cathleen*, formerly *The Countess Kathleen*, a poetic drama, was motivated by the Irish folklore. Yeats frequently revised the play for several years to bring it to line with the developing revelation of poetry on the stage. The play is derived from a French story in a time of starvation and deprivation, Satan sends demons to Ireland in order to bargain the souls of the starved people. While the farmers are ready to merchandize, and get costs according to their relative sinfulness, the great property owner Countess Cathleen is shocked by the unending loss of countless powerless souls. The virtuous noblewoman main character, Cathleen places her huge domains and riches, "retaining only her castle and its surrounding pastures" (Jeffares, Alexander Norman and Knowland, A. S. 1975, p. 5) in order to nourish the peasants, nonetheless the demons prevent her in every try. Eventually, she sacrifices her soul to save the poor. "Yeats's drama *The Countess Cathleen* (1899) drew fury ..., critical

of what they saw as an elitist and anti- Catholic portrayal of one of the greatest tragedies in Irish history, the Great Famine of the 1840s. In the play, the title character offers to sell her soul to the devil to earn money for her starving tenants” (Luckhurst, 2006, p. 91).

The Countess Cathleen, “a play in blank verse,” (Drabble, Margaret. 2000, p. 237) has seen many alterations and revisions. The main character in this poetic play is a girl called Cathleen, who appears as a noble and brave figure “sells her soul to certain demons for money that the people may not be compelled by starvation to sell theirs” (O’Donnel, William H. and Douglas N. Achibald. 1999, p. 308).

She sells her soul to the devils for the upliftment of Ireland and not like Dr Faustus, who sold his soul, flesh and body to devil for nothing more beneficial than twenty-four years of magic and black art. The Countess Cathleen sacrifices herself to rescue and save her people from starvation and poverty. The demons appropriate her money and stop her from serving her poor people. In that case, she obliges the demons to bring back the peasants' souls in replacement for hers, which she is ready to sell in order to protect the peasant from the demons.

Her sacrifice transformed her character and personality into the status of a heroine. The sacrifice of the heroine Cathleen’s soul to devils makes her more virtuous than an ordinary human being. The play, *The Countess Cathleen*,

symbolizes a contest between good and evil, between a material existence and a spiritual existence. Cathleen did not change her feeling or passion against her lover, the poet Abel, who begged her to look after her own life and keep away from despair and dismay in life. There is an outward conflict in this play, which show the dramatic conflict required to arouse passion. Consequently, the lack of dramatic conflict turns the poetry undramatic. It may be thus rightly said that this play, as well as *The Land of Heart's Desire*, depend more upon their poetic strangeness than upon dramatic power.

The play is rich with lyrical passages and short poetical speeches which are of sovereign value and arresting beauty, apart from the dramatic context such as the speech of Mary with the two Merchants when she sings:

Destroyers of souls, God will destroy you quickly.

You shall at last dry like dry leaves and hang

Nailed like dead vermin to the doors of God.¹

The play is clearly dominated by striking imaginative and symbolic poetry overwhelming it all such as the following lines by The Angel who says:

(1) Yeats, W. B. 1920. *The Countess Cathleen*, Vol. 1 of Dublin plays, London: T. Fisher Unwin Ltd. Digitized by the Internet Archive in 2008. p. 32 [all quotations on *The Countess Cathleen* are quoted from this edition and pages are used after the quoted lines].

The light heats down، the gates of pearl are wide.

And she is passing to the floor of peace,

And Mary of the seven times wounded heart

Has kissed her lips, and the long blessed hair

Has fallen on her face ؛ the Light of Lights

Looks always on the motive, not the deed,

The Shadow of Shadows on the deed alone. p. 118

The play is totally poetic with grand amazing rhythms such as the following lines chanted by Cathleen directed to the poet, Aleel:

Do not hold out to me beseeching hands.

This heart shall never waken on earth. I have sworn,

By her whose heart the seven sorrows have pierced,

To pray before this altar until my heart

Has grown to Heaven like a tree, and there

Rustled its leaves, till Heaven has saved my people. pp. 58-9

After the negotiation with the demons, "she has only minutes" to live, as one of the demons says. When she dies, she is forgiven in favor of her sinfulness since she struggled to lend a hand to the people. After the Angel has guaranteed exoneration for Cathleen, her foster mother, Oona terminates the story with the following stunning verse lines:

Tell them who walk upon the floor of peace

That I would die and go to her I love;
 The years like great black oxen tread the world,
 And God the herdsman goads them on behind,
 And I am broken by their passing feet. p. 103

The play tells about “how to turn an Irish folktale into a verse-play, how landlords should care for their tenants” (Richards, Shaun. 2004, p. 38).

The Countess Cathleen “and its lyrics had become, as Yeats desired, ‘indissoluble’ ... he recalls the Countess Cathleen’s dying words and becomes suffused with a ‘soft liquid joy’ as the verses crooned in the ear of his memory” (Schuchard, Ronald. p. 27). An obvious imaginative portrait of the noble countess and her sacrifice is presented remarkably in the poetical lines pronounced by Cathleen addressing Oona and Aleel as a mark of heroic deep meaning and poetic:

Bend down your faces, Oona and Aleel;
 I gaze upon them as the swallow gazes
 Upon the nest under the eave, before
 She wander the loud waters. Do not weep
 Too great a while, for there is many a candle
 On the High Altar though one fall. pp. 98-99

In his plays, *The Land of Heart's Desire*, and *The Countess Cathleen*, and may be in others, Yeats “does not convince dramatically. In these he persuades. It may be the

finer way for the imagination: to persuade by the thing seen, rather than by the thing shown. But it is not the way of Drama, whose end is to be achieved by methods of illusion other than those of cadence and color.” (Macleod, Fiona. The North American Review, Vol. p. 483). Moreover, we realize the poetic aspects of the plays such as imagination, color and paying attention to cadence which refers to the highest poetical element proving the crafty of Yeats as a poet dramatist.

Conclusion

These plays and the previous ones of W. B. Yeats, denote Yeats's career as a creative, and ingenuous writer, as a poet-playwright, and a social commentator. His poetic plays together, with his poetry and other literary writings, proffer the readers with a precious documentation of the competing demands of poetic technique on the modern stage. To a great extent, he was preoccupied and concerned with the problem of writing modern poetic plays. In the twenties, poetic drama is the most difficult genre of literature to be composed.

Yeats determined his plays to reach out more to the audience with his poetry. He insisted that poetic drama should be able to appeal to and fascinate a few interested numbers of spectators, and since poetry finds its uppermost fulfillment in the theatre, the poetic and the dramatic can be integrated.

W. B. Yeats asserted that people should go to see poetic plays for spiritual excitement and for experiencing a dreamlike state in which they surmount the daily problems and worries of life that press strongly on their thoughts and hearts, claiming insight into the depth of the human heart, naturally emphasized the spiritual dominance of the theatre.

The sequence of events in a dramatic plot does not need to be severely logical. Part of the action may be symbolical, and even the abnormal and irrational are allowed in the body of action.

Yeats dedicated a reasonable period of his time to a motivated program of lessening the distance between poetry and the theatre in order to attract the audience's attention to the realities which they are apt to forget under the pressure of their worldly affairs. He struggled to build a verse which appeared to have been carved out of living speech because he believed that verse should be capable of working on its listeners' minds unobtrusively. "Yeats deserves to be considered as an influence on the Irish drama, for he ... touched off a new dramatic movement in Ireland. He introduced the poetic drama and inducted a semblance of the Japanese Noh drama in the Irish theatre" (Sarker, Sunil Kumar. 2002. p. 305).

To sum up, the poetic plays of W. B. Yeats have found a permanent scene in the repertory of English poetic dramas for the modern stage. "Although William butler Yeats has been celebrated more as a poet than as a dramatist, from another angle of vision poetic drama was central to his artistic life" (Owens, D. Coilin and Joan N. Radner. 2000, p. 38). The skill of the poet is evident in his choice of language. His poetic plays are of great merit. They, to a great extent, have solved the problems of poetic drama, and Yeats has shown convincingly that poetic drama is possible in the modern age. Through both his essays and his practical verse plays, W. B. Yeats has successfully and tangibly contributed to the revival of the English poetic drama in the twentieth century.

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