



A study of Ecological Images in William Butler Yeats' Poems from the perspective of New Historicism

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Abstract

Ecology dates back to the state of organisms in surroundings and also the features of creatures. There are many descriptions of the environment in William Yeats' poems. From the perspective of new historicism, this paper analyses the ecological images of poetry from two aspects: the historicity of the text and the textuality of history. Ecological images are those depicting nature and cities. Among them, birds, roses, and Innisfree are the classic ones. Through these images, William Yeats concerns the relationship between the ecology and people. I have taken poems like , "The Lake Isle of Innisfree, A Fairy Calling upon a Child", "The Second Coming", "Sailing to Byzantium, "When You are Old", "The Wild Swan At Coole" to prove my stand. Ecological images have a literal meaning and connotative meaning. It is necessary to reinterpret the ecological connotation in poetry, re-examine the images in modernist poetry, analyse the social situation at that time, the limitations of social situation on Yeats' huts, branches, nine rows of beans, crickets and roads. Today, along with the issues the industrial revolution brings out, the ecological images deserve more attention. In my paper i want to say how Yeast's poems reveal the personal experience and historical reality, and also the poems themselves become a treasure and have the textuality.

Key words: *historicity of text, textuality of history, ecological images, perspective.*

William Butler Yeats was an Irish poet, dramatist, writer and one of the foremost figures of 20th century Literature. He was a driving force behind the Irish Literary establishment. My paper is that W. B. Yeats' poetic treatment of Irish Landscape enabled him to develop his poetry and drama of Ireland as it emerged into an independent nation. In order to create 'elaborate and intense' Irish literature, Yeats knew that he needed to infuse his writing with the same of place, the land from which the Irish ballads and mythologies had sprung. Although Yeats describes many different locations in Ireland, when the poetic speaker identifies with place, it is inevitably

Sligo or Galway. Not simply a poet of Landscape, Yeats steeped his poetry in history, culture, mythology, and politics saying in effect, ‘I know because of the traditions associated with these places.’

The Celtic Twilight, published in 1893 by the Irish poet Yeats, brings tales and retellings of Irish folklore. Fairies, ghosts and spirits are recurrent topics amongst the stories.

The narrator mentions that usually the people who tell the tales about ghosts and find in them the fascination of fear. It is said that these people live in such a wild and beautiful scenery that end up not being afraid of ghosts but feeling amused by their doings.

‘The Lake Isle of Innisfree’ is perhaps the best known of all Yeats’ poems. . Now the place ‘innisfree’ has become a place of pilgrimage in country Sligo. Innisfree is an ideal place William Yeats longs to go because innisfree is his home and he connects an ideal place with Irish ecological reality.

This green and watery landscape is where the young Yeats spent time as a child and the idyllic imagery remained strong in his memory.

What is striking about the poem is the rhythm within each line. The opening line, with the narrative verb, will, imply that the speaker is looking into future, promising himself peace and an ideal existence. So, the poem’s progress reflects an inner wish, to get away from the anxiety of the current life to the harmony of a rural idyll.

The second part of my paper lights upon the Irish movement for which I have taken poems like ‘September 1913 ‘and ‘Easter 1916’. The poems were set in Dublin, Ireland, in 1913 and 1916 respectively.

Yeats’ childhood was spent between London and Dublin-the cities in which his father sought to earn a living as an artist-and the Irish countryside of Sligo, where he spent vacations with his extended family.

Yeats met the Irish nationalist, O’Leary, who became his much admired master. Through O’Leary’s introduction in 1889 Yeats met and fell in love with Maud Gonne, a nationalist, who became the muse that inspires and haunts much of his poetry.

In brief, ‘September 1913’ is a poem in which Yeats laments the loss of ‘Romantic Ireland’. Each of the four stanzas of ‘September’ 1913 ends with the same repeated refrain ‘Romantic Ireland is dead and gone/ it’s with O’Leary in the grave.’ In fact, ‘September 1913’ is a poem that responds to a turning point in early twentieth century Ireland.

The first stanza of ‘Easter 1916’ describes Dublin, where the revolutionaries lived and worked. Dublin is known for in ‘eighteenth century houses’, rows of connected and identical four-story brick homes, each doorway made distinctive by ‘fan light’ window.

Towards the end of the stanza, Yeats introduces the subtle, but powerful, metaphor of 'motley'. To wear motley is to wear different colours combined. The stanza ends with the refrain that will make all the stanzas of the poem, the oxymoron, 'a terrible beauty is born'. The Easter Rising was terrible because of its violence and loss of life, but the beauty was in the dream of independence, 'a winged horse' of romantic imagination.

In the third part, 'when you are old' and 'Sailing to Byzantium' are chosen to explain Yeats' understanding of true love and reflect his pursuit towards the eternity of art and life. 'When You are old' is a bittersweet poem that reveals the complexities of love. The poem is generally taken to be addressed to Maud Gonne, an Irish actress with whom Yeats was infatuated throughout his life. In any case, the poem argues in favour of a kind of love based on physical appearances-which fade over time- but on the deeper beauty of the soul.

The prevalence of the pastoral tradition in modern Irish poetry may be among the most ending influences of the Irish Revival. 'Byzantium' was an ancient Greek city of beautiful architecture and high seat of early Christianity. For Yeats, Byzantium represents a paradise of perfection, unspoilt by history of civilization. It is therefore, a city of imagination, representing everything worthy that the modern era has lost, in its mad pursuit of material and temporal achievements.

In Romantic poets, the nightingales and skylarks had provided an escape into the world of the ideal, the world of the immortals. Yeats downright rejects such a representation. He classifies "birds in the trees" as part of the living world with their inevitable mortality and limitations.

In the third part, 'When You are Old' and 'Sailing to Byzantium' are chosen to explain Yeats' understanding of true love and reflect his pursuit towards the eternity of art and life. 'Byzantium' was an ancient Greek City of beautiful architecture and high seat of early Christianity. For him, Byzantium represented a paradise of perfection, unspoilt by history of civilization. It is therefore, a city of imagination, representing everything worthy that the modern era has lost, in its mad pursuit of material and temporal achievements. Yeats here in this poem speaks about the sensual music of the soul. 'Sailing to Byzantium' becomes a starting point to understand Yeats' idea of creative immortality and spiritual emancipation. In the poem, 'When You Are Old' the speaker wants Maud Gonne to regret losing him when she is old and her beauty has faded. He believes that when she is old she will truly regret having lost the one person who loved her soul. Thus, he is trying to get her to picture herself as an old woman before she gets there.

The fourth part combines natural ecology, social ecology and spiritual ecology in analysing 'The Stolen Child' and 'A fairy calling Upon A Child' and thus, explores the holistic ecological ideas in Yeats' poems. The poem 'Stolen Child' is based on Irish legend and concerns fairies beguiling a child to come away with them. The poem reflects the early influence of Romantic Literature and Pre-Raphaelite verse.

Thus, I can say that there are many descriptions of the environment in William Yeats' poems. From the perspective of new historian, this paper analyses the ecological images of poetry from two aspects: from

historicity of the text and the textuality of history. Ecological images are those depicting nature and cities. Among them birds, roses, and Innisfree are classical ones. Through these images, Irish ecology enters the public. Moreover, William Yeats applies defamiliarization and intertextuality to contrasting the authoritative history and offering a fresh history.

Through the interpretation of ecological images in Yeats's poems, from the perspective of new historicism, readers would know about the relationship between nature and humans. People should not be human-centered. Today, along with the issues the industrial revolution brings out, the ecological images deserve more attention. Moreover, traditional culture and contemporary culture blend with each other, and readers will extract the essence and remove the dross. Therefore, culture can be enriched to affect the creation of the text, and then be shaped into history. Thus, poems reveal the personal experience and historical reality and also the poems themselves become a treasure and have the textuality.

The poem 'Stolen Child' is based on Irish legend and concerns fairies beguiling a child to come away with them. The poem reflects the early influence of Romantic literature and Pre-Raphaelite verse. The destructive force of the Industrial Revolution could be found in 'The Stolen Child'. The images in the 'Stolen Child' are all obscure and not beautiful things such as rats, rushes, trout, hills, kettles and stoves.

Thus I have justified my initial premise with which I have started my discussion and safely conclude that W. B. Yeats may be considered as one of the environmentalists who write from an Eco-Critical perspective.

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