

**‘JUST AS STRENUOUS A NATIONALIST AS EVER’,  
W.B. YEATS AND POSTCOLONIALISM:  
TENSIONS, AMBIGUITIES, AND UNCERTAINTIES**

by

MOHAMMAD NABI MEIMANDI

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**To the loving memory of my father**

**and to**

**Shahrzad and Mohsen**

## ABSTRACT

This study investigates William Butler Yeats's relationship to the issues of colonialism and anti-colonialism and his stance as a postcolonial poet. A considerable part of Yeats criticism has read him either as a revolutionary and anti-colonial figure or a poet with reactionary and colonialist mentality. The main argument of this thesis is that in approaching Yeats's position as a (post)colonial poet, it is more fruitful to avoid an either / or criticism and instead to foreground the issues of change, circularity, and hybridity. The theoretical framework is based on Homi Bhabha's analysis of the complicated relationship between the colonizer and the colonized identities. It is argued that Bhabha's views regarding the hybridity of the colonial subject, and also the inherent complexity and ambiguity in the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized can provide us with a better understating of the Irish poet's complex interactions with Irish nationalism and British colonialism. By a close reading of some of Yeats's works from different periods of his long career, it is shown that most of the time he adopted a double, ambiguous, and even contradictory position with regard to his political loyalties. It is suggested that the very presence of tensions and uncertainties which permeates Yeats's writings and utterances should warn us against a monolithic, static, and unchanging reading of his colonial identity. Finally, it is argued that a postcolonial approach which focuses on the issue of diversity and hybridity of the colonial subject can increase our awareness of Yeats's complex role in and his conflicted relationship with a colonized and then a (partially) postcolonial Ireland.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

*Au- Autobiographies* (London: Macmillan, 1961).

*AV- A Vision* (London: Macmillan, 1962).

*CL II- The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats*, General Editor: John Kelly, vol. 2. 1896-1900, eds., Warwick Gould, John Kelly, and Deirdre Toomey, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

*CT- The Celtic Twilight* (London: A. H. Bullen, 1902).

*CW X- The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats: Later Articles and Reviews*, vol. x., ed., Colton Johnson (New York: Scribner, 2000).

*E & I- Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1961).

*Ex- Explorations* (London: Macmillan, 1962).

*L- The Letters of W.B. Yeats*, ed., Allen Wade (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954).

*LNI- Letters to the New Island*, ed., Horace Reynolds (London: Oxford University Press, 1970).

*M- Mythologies* (London: Macmillan, 1959).

*Mem- W.B. Yeats: Memoirs, Autobiography- First Draft Journal*, ed., Denis Donoghue (London: Macmillan, 1972).

*SS- The Senate Speeches of W.B. Yeats*, ed., Donald R. Pearce (London: Faber and Faber, 1960).

*VP- The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats*, eds., Russell K. Alspach and Peter Allt (London: Macmillan, 1957).

*VPL- The Variorum Edition of the Plays of W.B. Yeats*, ed., Russell K. Alspach (London: Macmillan, 1966).

*UP I- Uncollected Prose by W. B. Yeats*, vol. I., ed., John P. Frayne (London: Macmillan, 1970).

*UP II- Uncollected Prose by W.B. Yeats*, vol. II., eds., John P. Frayne and Colton Johnson (London: Macmillan, 1975).

## INTRODUCTION

### OPENING REMARKS

In the *Dictionary of Irish Literature* under the entry of W.B. Yeats, the introductory paragraph runs as follows: ‘Yeats, William Butler (1865-1939), a foremost poet of the English-speaking world, founder of the Abbey Theatre, dramatist, spokesman for the Irish Literary Revival, essayist, autobiographer, occultist, member of the Irish Free State Senate, and winner of the 1923 Nobel Prize for literature’.<sup>1</sup> Even as a brief introductory paragraph, this statement does not seem to present an accurate image of a writer who can be called, quite deservedly and justifiably, one of the most prominent literary figures of English literature in the twentieth century. Indeed, the extensive and various activities and subjects which preoccupied Yeats, and were in one way or another reflected in his vast and miscellaneous output, make it difficult to present a complete and satisfactory list of them. Over the years he has been approached and interpreted by different critics as a Pre-Raphaelite, symbolist, romantic, socialist, nationalist, occultist, fascist, eugenicist, modernist, and postcolonialist, a list which points to the vast diversity of his work and to the multiplicity of interpretations of that work. The latest version of Yeats, that is, Yeats as a postcolonial artist, is a relatively new one. Equally well-contested is the very definition of postcolonialism itself, whether Ireland is a postcolonial country or was in the first place a colony, and finally the status of Yeats as a postcolonial figure.

The life and the works of Ireland’s most famous poet, dramatist, critic, essayist, and senator are open to all these different interpretations. All throughout his career and much more after his death Yeats’s literary achievement and his turbulent life have been the focus of interest and criticism. There is no shortage of literary criticism on different aspects of his life and works; on the contrary there is a great deal of critical material on Yeats. Prolific and miscellaneous as he was, Yeats criticism seems to have followed suit. As David Pierce, editor of the massive and scholarly four volumes of



*W.B. Yeats: Critical Assessments* has noted: 'Since 1886 there has not been a year when Yeats was not the subject of a critical review or article. If the conventional sign of classic status is that more has been written about the person than the person himself wrote, then Yeats has a status as high as any classic'.<sup>2</sup> One remarkable point about Yeats is the breadth and variety of his interests and works: magic, occult, theosophy, politics, culture, Irish nationalism, theatre management, philosophy, public speech, lyrical poetry, essay-writing, drama, short stories. Another is the persistent development and improvement of his works. Yeats is undoubtedly among a few poets who created excellent and memorable work which maintains their highest level of achievement throughout his long career, even up to the last years of his life. One need only to think of such outstanding collections as *The Tower* or *The Winding Stairs and Other Poems*, both published when the poet was over fifty.

As the title of this thesis shows the main focus of my argument will be Yeats's complex, changing and unstable interactions with the issues of Irish nationalism and British colonialism. This will naturally call for leaving out some other significant features of his work. I am quite aware that there are many various aspects of Yeats's life and work which are important, but I will not be discussing them because they are not directly relevant to my thesis. A deeply complex and multidimensional man, Yeats had numerous interests throughout his life. Just to name some of them, questions such as magic, symbolism, East, Indian mysticism, Japanese Noh drama, theatre management, occult, theosophy, and philosophy were among his preoccupations. There is a substantial body of criticism which discusses these various issues. In the following pages I will offer a short overview of some of the various and important themes and issues in Yeats's life and work which have been the subject of Yeats literary criticism over the years.

The question of magic and occult, for example, was a central and recurrent preoccupation within Yeats's life and work. From an early age he developed a lifelong interest in a variety of supernatural phenomena such as magic, mysticism, spiritualism, occultism, and astrology, which lasted up to his final years. He not only read

extensively on these subjects all through his life, but also took part in various psychic experiments such as séances, card readings, and automatic writing sessions. Yeats was deeply involved in the occultist organizations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In 1885 he co-founded the Dublin Hermetic Society, in the following year became an active member of Dublin Theosophical Lodge and joined The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in 1890. After his marriage to Georgie Hyde-Lee in 1917, and upon his discovery that she was a medium, both became involved with a form of automatic writing out of which came the material for his colossal work *A Vision*. As to the important role that the study and the practice of magic played in his life and works, he was quite eloquent; magic was ‘next to my poetry, the most important pursuit of my life... If I had not made magic my constant study I could not have written a single word of my Blake book, nor would *The Countess Kathleen* have ever come to exist. The mystical life is the centre of all that I do and all that I think and all that I write’ (*L*, 210-11). In spite of dismissive views such as Auden’s, who discarded Yeats’s associations with magical activities as ‘so essentially lower-middle-class-...-mediums, spells, the Mysterious Orient- *how* embarrassing’, a considerable number of detailed studies have been carried out, which probe different aspects of Yeats’s involvement in such activities, and the significant role they had in his poetic development.<sup>3</sup>

Yeats’s Irishness is an umbrella topic which encompasses the poet’s interaction with Irish tradition, including Irish folklore, legends, and mythology. His relationship and contribution to that tradition, and its effects on his thought and writing has been one of the most important subjects that Yeats criticism has dealt with since the outset. So has been the issue of Yeats’s Irish lineage, his literary background, and his uneasy connections with both the Protestant Anglo-Irish and the Catholic Irish. Coming from the mixed background of an Anglo-Irish family, which in the eyes of the native Catholics were associated with the English colonizers, Yeats was always anxious to prove his status as an Irish poet, and apart from an early brief period, he tried hard to concentrate on an Irish subject-matter in his writings. In his youth one of his recurrent mottos was ‘Ireland is the true subject for the Irish’ (*LNI*, 90). His interest in the Irish peasants and their lives, his untiring work on collecting Irish folklore and mythology,

and his contribution to the Irish literary revival, were all means towards realizing that motto. However, in his middle and later period, and following his disappointment with and estrangement from mainstream Irish nationalism and the emerging Catholic Free State, he turned towards a different version of Ireland, an eighteenth-century Protestant-ruled Ireland with an Anglo-Irish tradition.<sup>4</sup>

Yeats's fame is not just due to his poetry; he was also a well-known, prolific and in his own way an experimental playwright. In 1899, along with Lady Gregory, Edward Martyn, and George Moore, he established the Irish Literary Theatre to promote Celtic and Irish plays. His own plays range from the dream-laden *The Land of Heart's Desire*, the controversial *The Countess Cathleen* and the explicitly nationalist *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* to the more artistic and experimental plays of his middle and late periods such as *The Player Queen*, *Fighting the Waves*, and *Purgatory*. Above all he was interested in employing music and poetical speech in his own plays and endeavoured to create a kind of poetic drama in which speech had a prominent part over action and scenery. Yeats was introduced through Ezra Pound and Ernest Fenellosa to Japanese Noh drama, which inspired some of his plays such as *At the Hawk's Well* and *The Death of Cuchulain*. Yeats's borrowings from Noh tradition has been an important subject discussed by some critics. Moreover his involvement in the Abbey theatre both as a playwright and as a practical theatre manager has been the focus of a considerable number of critical studies.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout his long literary career Yeats interacted extensively with different contemporary literary figures. He studied the works and came to know some of the great artists, thinkers, and philosophers of previous generations. Yeats was familiar with and deeply influenced by, among others, the thoughts and the ideas of Nietzsche, Balzac, Goethe, and Blake. He expressed his indebtedness to his predecessors time and again, for example at one point he called himself 'Blake's disciple' (*VP*, 835). At another he confessed to Maud Gonne that it was Balzac's writings which 'changed all my political ideas'.<sup>6</sup> A considerable number of critical studies have probed the extent and the nature of these various figures' effects on Yeats's ideas and on his *oeuvre*, and have assessed how his work was enriched by building on a vast and strong literary and

philosophical tradition.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, Yeats both influenced and was affected by the artists of his own generation. His position among his contemporary artists, the borrowings, the similarities and the differences between his aesthetic and political thought with theirs has entailed a substantial amount of criticism. Another significant issue, which has been thoroughly explored by a number of critical studies, is Yeats's continuing influence on and his extensive legacy for the literary generations who came after him, not only Irish artists but also English and American ones, poets as diverse as Louise MacNeice, Austin Clarke, Seamus Heaney, Derek Mahon, Paul Muldoon, Ezra Pound, and Ted Hughes.<sup>8</sup>

The question of women, love, and Yeats's relationships has been the focus of much critical investigation. Although his lifelong passionate and unfulfilled love was Maud Gonne, in different periods during his lifetime Yeats was involved in a number of romantic affairs with women such as Olivia Shakespear, Florence Farr, Margot Ruddock, Dorothy Wellesley and Ethel Mannin. Many of his memorable poems are love lyrics or poems in which love is one of the main motives. To name all these poems would make a very long list, but among them we can mention poems inspired by his love for Maud Gonne such as 'The Sorrow of Love', 'When you are old', 'The Folly of Being Comforted', 'Adam's Curse'; poems addressed to Olivia Shakespear such as 'After Long Silence', 'The Travail of Passion', 'He bids his beloved to be at peace' and 'The lover mourns for the loss of love'; and poems about Margot Ruddock such as 'A Crazy Girl' and 'Sweet Dancer'. Not all Yeats's love poems were personal; he also composed poems about the love stories of Irish mythological figures such as Cuchulain and Niamh, Fergus and Ness, Baile and Allinn. In his final years, one can witness a rekindling of sexual love as a recurrent motif in Yeats's works, as poems like 'The Wild Old Wicked Man', 'The Chambermaid's First Song', 'The Chambermaid's Second Song' and the sequence of Crazy Jane poems with their explicit sexual imagery suggest. Yeats also developed strong and enduring friendships with women who were to play an important role in his literary and personal career, women such as Cathleen Tynan, Lady Gregory, and Miss Ann Hornian. Critics have written extensively on Yeats's ideas about and relationships with women and love.

These include the role women friends had in his life, Yeats's love affairs, and the representations of feminine characters, sex, love and the beloved in Yeats's poetry.<sup>9</sup>

Yeats's preoccupation with the East and with Eastern philosophy and art was also a lifelong interest for the Irish poet. In his early years he became familiar with Indian thought through Mohini Chatterjee and in the last decade of his life he collaborated with Shree Purohit Swami on an English translation of *The Ten Principal Upanishads*. It was also through his association with Swami that Yeats came to know the Vedantic and Yogic systems. Yeats wrote introductions to famous Indian books such as *Gitanjali* by Rabindranath Tagore and *The Holy Mountain* by Swami's master Bhagwan Shri Hamsa. Apart from India Yeats was familiar with Japanese art through his introduction to Noh drama by Ezra Pound and actually adapted some aspects of it into his own plays. Moreover his knowledge of Japanese philosophy grew during the last decades of his life when he studied Japanese author Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki's newly published works on Zen Buddhism. The Eastern influence on Yeats's poetry is evident throughout his long literary career. From early poems such as 'The Indian Upon God', 'Anashuya and Vijaya', and 'The Indian to His Love', through his mid-career poetry with poems such as 'Byzantium', 'Sailing to Byzantium', and 'The Gift of Harun Al-Rashid' up to the late poetry with poems such as 'Meru', 'Lapis Lazuli', and 'Imitated From Japanese' we can see the presence of Eastern subject matter and thought. Although there are some thorough and valuable studies on Yeats and the East, it seems that more still needs to be done in this area of Yeats criticism.<sup>10</sup>

The poetic development of Yeats has usually been mapped out as moving from a late romantic poet to a modernist one. In his early period he was influenced by major English romantic poets such as Blake, Keats and Shelley. His early poetry has a romantic style and subject matter. His poems follow the conventions of romantic verse, utilizing familiar rhyme schemes, metric patterns, and poetic structures; the focus is on love, longing and loss, nature, and Irish myths. Though not a canonical modernist figure like Pound, Lewis, Lawrence, Woolf or Eliot, Yeats's middle to late work shares some characteristic similarities with the modernists. Stylistically, for

example, there is a shift from the much ornamented and conventional language of the early poems towards a more austere and serious type of diction. Thematically, from Yeats's middle poetry onwards, there appears an authoritarian hostility to modern society and its values, an engagement with contemporary issues, especially politics, an inclination towards aristocratic ideals, and a contempt for the masses. Consequently his works have been approached and evaluated within these two literary backgrounds. Although literary studies on Yeats and Romanticism date back to as early as the 1930s, the question of Yeats and Modernism is a rather newer topic in Yeats literary criticism. Major critics such as Harold Bloom and Edmund Wilson have discussed romantic elements in Yeats's poetry. Likewise the modernist features of the poet's works have entailed a host of literary reviews, and his work has been placed among and compared to those of some of the great modernists.<sup>11</sup>

A lively forum for hot and sometimes bitter quarrels between opposing groups of critics has been the controversial subject of Yeats and politics. This broad subject includes sub-categories such as Yeats's nationalism, his views on the ideal government, his hatred for democracy, his love for aristocracy, his interactions with Socialism, Fascism, eugenics and his status as an anti-colonial and postcolonial poet. Over the years Yeats was in one way or another preoccupied with politics. He took sides in the Irish struggle for independence by writing nationalist poetry and drama, by launching the Irish Literary Revival, and by founding several different literary organizations which, through art, promoted the Irish cause. He was associated with political figures such as Maud Gonne and John O'Leary. He even became more actively involved in political activities in his youth by acting, for example, as the president of the committee for the centenary commemoration of the Wolf Tone Rebellion, and becoming a member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. In the last decade of his life he flirted with the ideas of Fascism and supported the notorious Blueshirt Movement for a short period, expressing some provocative and reactionary opinions regarding the question of ideal government. He even played the role of politician as a senator of The Irish Free State. In spite of all these direct and indirect political activities Yeats was not a politician in the traditional sense of the word. He

was first and foremost an artist, but writing in a time and place when the relationship between art, nationalism, and politics was of utmost importance, he did not want to be a practitioner of art for art's sake. His life and his works are in one way or another bound up with politics. There is a vast body of critical writing on the relationship between Yeats's political ideas and his work. Some critics have discarded his political beliefs as reactionary and authoritarian, which on the whole has been inimical to the Irish situation. Others have tried to portray him as a revolutionary and as a nationalist who played an important role in Ireland's anti-colonial struggle. There is a third group who have taken a more comprehensive and balanced approach to Yeats's politics, considering all its aspects.<sup>12</sup>

The above-mentioned subjects are just some of the significant points of discussion in Yeats criticism. There are some other topics such as Yeats and English culture, the question of composition and revision in Yeats, and Yeats's prose writings, which have been treated by different critics over the last decades.<sup>13</sup> Moreover there are a considerable number of books which include collections of critical articles discussing different aspects of his works.<sup>14</sup> Yeats's life has also attracted critical attention of not only literary critics and biographers but also a distinguished historian like Roy Foster whose thorough and valuable two volumes on Yeats have been the latest biography of the Irish poet.<sup>15</sup>

## **THESIS ARGUMENT AND THEORETICAL APPROACH**

The subject of my thesis, the question of Yeats and postcolonialism, can be considered as a sub-category of Yeats's politics. As with the latter issue, Yeats's relationship to the issues of colonialism and anti-colonialism and his stance as a postcolonial poet have been subject to much diverse critical debate. As to the meaning of postcolonialism I will explain the different interpretations of the term and how it is used in my thesis in the next chapter. However, it is necessary here right at the beginning to make it clear that postcolonialism in this study does not refer to a chronological view of the term; that is, a period which starts after the end of colonial rule. This interpretation of the term will naturally exclude Yeats as a postcolonial artist

as during most of his life Ireland was a colony of England and it was only in his later years that his country gained partial independence from its neighbour. What I mean by postcolonialism is a relationship, an engagement and an interaction with the legacies of colonialism and its counterpart anti-colonial nationalism. Through this definition Yeats can be considered as a postcolonial poet as a considerable number of his prose writings and poems engage with the issues of Irish nationalism and anti-colonial struggle, Irish identity, and British colonialism.

The idea for this thesis came to my mind when I was going through different critics' views about Yeats's politics and came across Edward Said's and Seamus Deane's views of Yeats. These critics' versions of the Irish poet are representative of the two prevalent positions among Yeats's critics. One is the view of those critics who like Said consider Yeats as an anti-colonial poet; the other version belongs to those critics who along with Deane find colonialist thinking in Yeats's works and attitudes.<sup>16</sup> Both sides have been able to find in Yeats's writings a support for their arguments. The main argument of this thesis is that to call Yeats and his works either simply colonial or straightforwardly anti-colonial is to offer narrow and inadequate formulations, since his works cannot be fitted comfortably into either of these categories. On the contrary, to attest the contradictory aspect of his works and thought is to accept their complexity and depth. Any criticism that tries to define Yeats either as colonial or anti-colonial and then to defend or attack him on those grounds in fact only half-reads and therefore fails to display a whole representation of him. His works and attitudes simply defy this kind of restrictive labeling. We cannot finalize his position as either colonial or anti-colonial. By virtue of his mixed background and consequently his double loyalties, both his works and his life embodied a hybrid identity in the no-man's-land between colonizer and colonized, what Homi Bhabha has termed as 'a 'separate' space, a space of *separation* – less than one and double- which has been systematically denied by both colonialists and nationalists who have sought authority in the authenticity of 'origins''.<sup>17</sup>

The argument that Yeats cannot be once and forever pigeonholed as a wholeheartedly



revolutionary and anti-colonial poet or an extremist reactionary and colonialist one has already been put forward in a number of critical studies.<sup>18</sup> However, these have been in the form of essays and articles which generally have discussed one or two works, and as far as I know there is no extensive research which covers works from different periods of Yeats's career with a view to his colonial status. This latter approach is what I am trying to provide in my thesis.

The theoretical basis of this study is grounded in the complicated relationship between the colonizer and the colonized identities expounded by Homi Bhabha, one of the influential postcolonial critics, alongside Edward Said and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. In his treatment of the colonial situation Bhabha differs from Said. The most important point of departure is that while Said emphasizes the oppositions and differences between the colonizing centre and the colonized other, Bhabha looks for and stresses their similarities. The ideas of ambivalence, hybridity, and mimicry emphasized in his reading of the complex relationship between the colonizer and the colonized seem to be more productive in the case of Yeats than Said's concepts, which tend to oversimplify the colonial encounter and to define the identities of both sides as opposed to and distinct from each other. While the focal point for Said and by implication for Deane is the binary system of oppositions at work in colonial relations, Bhabha's analysis tries to move beyond this sharp and clear-cut 'polarity or division at the centre of Orientalism'.<sup>19</sup> For him, the inherent complexity and ambiguity in the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized undermines the outlook which looks at these identities as absolutely distinct and therefore inevitably in opposition to one another. This is exactly where he departs from Said and Frantz Fanon. Bart Moore-Gilbert puts it as follows:

Whereas early Said concentrates almost entirely on the colonizer and later Fanon almost entirely on the colonized, Bhabha seeks to emphasize the mutualities and negotiations across the colonial divide. For Bhabha the relationship between colonizer and colonized is more complex and nuanced – and politically fraught – than Fanon and Said imply, principally because the circulation of contradictory patterns of psychic effect in colonial relations (desire for, as well as fear of the Other, for example) undermines their assumption that the identities and positionings of colonized and colonizer exist in stable and unitary terms which

are absolutely distinct from, and necessarily in conflict with, each other.<sup>20</sup>

The interaction, which is not necessarily an oppositional one, between these two shifting and dynamic identities of colonized and colonizer should be placed at the heart of any discussion about Yeats's position as a postcolonial poet. Any criticism that takes one of these two identities as the true and fixed representation of Yeats, the man and the poet, is inclined to present an incomplete and one-dimensional picture of him. Bhabha sees colonial identity as a problem, which arises between the two sides of the conflict and results in the negation of any fixed and static identity for either of them. Commenting on *Black Skin, White Masks*, he welcomes the displacement of the binary categorization put forward by the early Fanon: 'That familiar alignment of colonial subjects- Black/White, Self/Other- is disturbed with one brief pause and the traditional grounds of racial identity are dispersed, whenever they are found to rest in narcissistic myths of Negritude or White cultural supremacy'.<sup>21</sup> Both Said's reading of Yeats as 'an exacerbated example of the *nativist* phenomenon which flourished elsewhere (e.g. *négritude*) as a result of the colonial encounter', and Deane's belief that 'Yeats had learned the notion of an essential racial 'signature' both from his Anglo-Irish mentors and from the English Romantics', apply a 'Black/White' or Self/Other' approach to the question of colonial identity. The heterogeneous and dialectical nature of postcolonialism does not allow for such a perfect antithesis, which regards colonial identities as independent, stable and fixed. Identity 'is only possible in the *negation* of any sense of originality or plenitude, through the principle of displacement and differentiation ... that always renders it a liminal reality'.<sup>22</sup> This differentiation should not necessarily be external; that is, between the two sides of the colonial encounter, it could be internal, inside each one of them: 'The place of difference and otherness, or the space of adversarial, within such a system of 'disposal' as I've proposed, is never entirely on the outside or implacably oppositional ... The contour of difference is agonistic, shifting, splitting'.<sup>23</sup>

Stephen Slemon expresses a similar view when discussing the literature of the so-called Second-World writers. He believes that 'the *illusion* of a stable self/other,

here/there binary division has *never* been available to Second-World writers'. Slemon then concludes that:

as a result the sites of figural contestation between oppressor and oppressed, colonizer and colonized, have been taken *inward* and *internalized* in Second-World post-colonial textual practice. By this I mean that the *ambivalence* of literary resistance itself is 'the always already' condition of Second-World settler and postcolonial literary writing, for in the white literatures of Australia, or New Zealand, or Canada, or Southern Africa, anti-colonialist resistance has *never* been directed at an object or a discursive structure which can be seen as purely external to the self.<sup>24</sup>

Although Ireland is excluded from Slemon's list of Second World countries, Yeats's work could be quite suitably included in the list and thus approached by applying the same view regarding the (post)colonial contestation between the colonizer and the colonized. In other words, at times we can find in Yeats's *oeuvre* an internalization of the colonial conflict, which results in a kind of ambiguous colonial identity reflected in the literature of the countries Slemon discusses. The oft-quoted part of 'A General Introduction for my Work' suggests a kind of internalized tension, an unconscious confession, a revealing example of the 'agonistic, shifting, splitting' drives and motives in Yeats's works which betrays his complicated and hybrid position as an Anglo-Irish poet torn between opposing impulses:

The 'Irishry' have preserved their ancient 'deposit' through wars which, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, became wars of extermination; no people, Lecky said ... have undergone greater persecution, nor did that persecution altogether cease up to our own day. No people hate as we do in whom that past is always alive, there are moments when hatred poisons my life and I accuse myself of effeminacy because I have not given it adequate expression. It is not enough to have put it into the mouth of a rambling peasant poet. Then I remind myself that mine is the first English marriage I know of in the direct line, all my family names are English, and that I owe my soul to Shakespeare, to Spenser, and to Blake, perhaps to William Morris, and to the English language in which I think, speak, and write, that everything I love has come to me through English; my hatred tortures me with love, my love with hate. I am like the Tibetan monk who dreams at his initiation that he is eaten by a wild beast and learns on waking that he himself is eater and eaten (*E & I*, 518-19)

The consciously felt self-division expressed here by the mature Yeats has always been within him, resurfacing now and then in his works and life. The question of language for postcolonial writers has always been inextricably bound up with questions of culture and identity. Their responses to this complicated and subtle issue have ranged from outright rejection of the English language to the appropriation of it with different shades in between. Here, a comparison between Yeats's and Joyce's reactions to the language of the colonizer would be of interest. The same postcolonial ambivalence toward the master tongue which leads to an internal unrest is present in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, but while for Yeats English is a mother tongue, Joyce's Stephen Dedalus resents it. For him in spite of the ambiguous stance of the oppressor's language as 'so familiar and so foreign', it would always remain 'an acquired speech', not his mother language.<sup>25</sup>

To interpret this honest, self-conscious and illuminating confession by Yeats as simply 'the pathology of literary unionism' is to ignore the complexity of the situation, that is, the complexities of Yeats's cultural in-betweenness, his split cultural experience and emotional ambivalence, and his conflicting loyalties.<sup>26</sup> Deborah Fleming's reading of this quotation is more comprehensive and inclusive when she suggests: 'Yeats articulates much more fully than most postcolonial writers the artist's dilemma in an emerging nation'.<sup>27</sup> While I agree with Fleming that Yeats's situation is symptomatic of the postcolonial artist, not only after the achievement of political independence and in the emerging nation but also during the period of anti-colonial struggle, I am more interested in and propose to explore different shifting attitudes which developed during Yeats's long career, were reflected throughout his works, and have produced such a dual and contradictory impression of him. The assumption of this thesis is that neither Said's nor Deane's, and by implication their followers' versions of a colonial/anti-colonial Yeats are complete as both views disregard the coexistence of two sets of attitudes in Yeats's personality and works. To quote Bhabha again: 'Two contradictory and independent attitudes inhabit the *same place*, one takes account of reality, the other is under the influence of instincts which detach the ego from reality. This results in the production of multiple and contradictory belief'.<sup>28</sup> I believe that the

last statement of this quotation best represents the actual position of Yeats. In other words, considering the highly composite nature of the postcolonial situation, it is more productive for a postcolonial criticism of Yeats to dismiss the concept of fixity, which has been the underlying feature of colonial discourse in the constitution of identity. A criticism that attributes inflexible, essentialist, and absolute adjectives to the ever changing, complicated and dissenting character of Yeats runs the risk of contributing to this notion of fixity. The problem that Yeats poses to the criticism which tries to fix his identity as belonging and loyal to *just* one side of the colonial divide will continue unless his ‘contradictory and independent attitudes’ and his ‘multiple and contradictory beliefs’ are taken into account.

## **THESIS OUTLINE**

A postcolonial approach to Yeats along the lines I am suggesting is more enabling and comprehensive if it frees itself from the prevalent, restricted and binary categorizations and foregrounds the questions of change, development, complexity, and the interplay of multiple drives and attitudes at work in colonial (colonizer and colonized) identities. This is the core of Bhabha’s notion of hybridity with its emphasis on the entangled and inseparable interrelationship between the colonizer and the colonized. This study aims to enunciate examples of Yeats’s multiple, developing, and sometimes contradictory views, which exemplifies the ‘agonistic, shifting, splitting’ outlooks of colonial identities. Bearing in mind the tensely hybrid nature of the postcolonial arena in general and of the Irish situation and of Yeats’s case in particular, I propose to probe the tensions, ambiguities, uncertainties, circularities and even contradictions which were present in his work.

To achieve this goal I will discuss some poems, plays and prose works from different periods of Yeats’s career. I will also draw on Yeats’s correspondence, speeches, interviews, essays, memoirs, and autobiography to support my arguments. My main criterion for choosing these texts has been their relevance to the questions of Yeats’s relationship to Irish nationalism and Yeats’s ambivalent stance towards it. What I am

trying to show is how Yeats's loyalties were divided between his commitment and attachment to and at the same time his criticism of and detachment from Irish nationalism and Irish anti-colonial struggle on the one hand, and his inherited Anglo-Irish background and English colonialism on the other. This feeling of uncertainty and the duality of allegiances towards an anti-colonial nationalist tradition and a colonial Anglo-Irish heritage is what constitutes Yeats's hybrid colonial status and makes him a true postcolonial poet.

This thesis consists of seven chapters. An introduction followed by five main chapters, and a conclusion. The present chapter, the introduction to my thesis has presented a brief review of Yeats's extensive and various interests and preoccupations and also the important themes which have been discussed in Yeats's criticism during recent decades. It has also briefly outlined the main argument of my thesis, namely that critics should acknowledge the complexity and the hybridity of Yeats's colonial status. An account of the primary works which will be discussed in the following chapters and a summary of the arguments in those chapters will follow.

Chapter one includes a selective but representative collection of different critics' views on three subjects: definitions of postcolonialism; Ireland and postcolonialism; and finally Yeats and postcolonialism. These are hotly-debated and controversial issues for several reasons. Firstly there are different interpretations among critics as to what postcolonialism stands for. Is it a period after the end of colonialism or is it a situation which starts with the beginning of anti-colonial struggles? Secondly there is less agreement among critics with regard to the acceptance of Ireland as a once-colonized country. While some critics regard Ireland as a former colony of the British Empire, others put Ireland in a European framework. Finally, whether Yeats is an anti-colonial and postcolonial poet or on the contrary a poet with colonialist mentalities is also open to much critical debate. After mentioning different and often opposite critical views, I will explain what is meant by 'postcolonialism' in this thesis and why the basic tenet of this study is that Ireland should be regarded as a postcolonial country and Yeats as a postcolonial poet. Moreover, the productiveness of Ireland's and, by

implication, Yeats's entry into postcolonial debate for both Yeats and postcolonial criticism will be discussed.

Chapter two will review the young Yeats's interaction with Irish nationalism and focus on his ambivalent attitudes towards it. While in his youth he was actively involved in cultural and even practical nationalist activities such as anti-English speeches and demonstrations, there was always a sceptical, questioning and unwilling side in him which betrayed his complex and conflicting attitudes towards these activities. I will argue that Yeats's engagement with the question of Irish nationalism had two sides, a public and a private one. While in his public speeches and his letters to the nationalist journals, we see a fervent nationalist; in his private letters we witness a hesitant and uncertain attitude as to the nature of his involvement with Irish nationalism. Moreover although Yeats tries to assert his position as a nationalist poet in 'To Ireland in the coming Times' the poem reveals his anxiety and uncertainty regarding the relevance of his poetry to and his differences from the main-stream Irish nationalism. Yeats's treatment of the question of colonial and anti-colonial stereotypes is also indicative of his mixed, uneasy and complicated position. While he passionately attacks the belittling view of the Irish by their colonizing neighbours, his own work sometimes tends to be an accomplice in stereotyping Irish as his depiction of, for example, the Irish peasant reveals. Moreover by presenting a stereotypical view of the English in his early writings, Yeats is subscribing to the colonialist strategy of inventing the other. In this chapter I will concentrate more on Yeats's prose including his letters, public speeches, *Essays and Introductions*, *Explorations*, *Uncollected Prose*, *Autobiographies*, and finally articles published in the nationalist periodicals such as *Boston Pilot* and *Providence Sunday Journal*. While his early poetry is more concerned with otherworldly and non-political interests such as fairies and folk beliefs, Yeats's prose is more directly concerned with political public events. There are, however, some poems and plays where he engages with Irish nationalism. Among these the main texts covered in this chapter are 'To Ireland in the Coming Times' and one of his first plays *Countess Cathleen*. While these are the main texts this chapter concentrates on, reference will be made to some other poems such as 'To the Rose

upon the rood of Time', 'The Dedication to a Book of Stories selected from the Irish Novelists', and 'The Stolen Child' to support my argument.

Chapter three will cover the middle years of Yeats's career, approximately the first two decades of the twentieth century. He wrote many plays during this time including *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, *The Hour-Glass*, *The King's Threshold*, *The Shadowy Waters*, *Where There is Nothing*, *On Baile's Strand*, *The Green Helmet*, and *The Player Queen*. In addition to play writing he was also actively managing the business of the Abbey Theatre. It was in these years and following several public controversies such as riots over Synge's *The Playboy of Western the World* and the disagreement between Yeats and Dublin middle-class over Hugh Lane's collection of paintings that he began to distance himself from the Irish main-stream nationalism. His disappointment with the Catholic nationalism of the time is reflected in poems of this middle period such as 'September 1913', 'Paudeen', and 'On those that hated *The Playboy of the Western World*, 1907'. The occurrence of the Easter Rising in 1916, however, had a deep impact on Yeats who had already mourned the disappearance of a heroic and romantic Ireland in his poems. The uprising and Yeats's uncertain and ambiguous reaction towards it is immortalized in his memorable elegiac poem 'Easter, 1916'. This poem along with Yeats's most well-known and proclaimed revolutionary play *Cathleen ni Houlihan* are the focus of this chapter. Both works are closely related to the question of Irish nationalist struggle. While the former is Yeats's most acclaimed nationalist play which commemorates the 1798 rebellion, the latter reveals the poet's mixed feelings towards the armed rebellion of Irish revolutionaries in the Easter of 1916. In a close reading of these two works I will argue that both attest Yeats's complicated and mixed relationship with Irish nationalists and their anti-colonial struggle. While *Cathleen ni Houlihan* is widely acclaimed as his most nationalist work, there are certain moments and points in the play which betray its author's questioning and uncertain attitude towards the sacrifice of the nationalists. In 'Easter 1916' this doubting aspect is more evident and the poem shows a mixture of attachment to and detachment from the Easter rising martyrs. Apart from these two main texts I have also drawn on some other poems from *Responsibilities*, some of Yeats's articles,



letters, his *Autobiographies*, and the introductions and the notes he wrote to his poems to support my argument. Pomes such as ‘Paudeen’, ‘To a Wealthy Man’, and ‘September 1913’, for example, are cited to show Yeats’s growing distrust of and estrangement from the main body of Irish nationalism, the Catholic middle-class of the first decade of the twentieth century.

The focus of chapter four is Yeats’s career in the 1920s, which were successful for Yeats both as a public figure and as a world-known poet. He was appointed a Senator of the Irish Free State in 1922 and the following year he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. However, for his country these years were ones of turbulence in its struggle for freedom from British colonialism. The Anglo-Irish war which began in 1919 and ended in 1921 was followed by the Irish Civil War in 1922. Both were among the main themes of Yeats’s poetry in *The Tower*. Among his other concerns at the time we can mention his preoccupation with the questions of old age, death, immortality through art, his dead friends, and the future of his descendants. After a brief overview of some of these recurrent themes in a number of poems from *The Tower* such as ‘The Tower’, ‘Sailing to Byzantium’ and ‘Among School Children’, chapter four will embark on a detailed reading of the two consecutive poems of this collection: ‘Meditations in Time of Civil War’ and ‘Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen’. In this chapter Yeats’s complex and double reaction towards English colonialism and Irish nationalism is discussed in the context of the two important wars in Irish history, the Anglo-Irish war and the Irish civil war. By a close reading of ‘Nineteen hundred and Nineteen’ and ‘Meditations in Time of Civil War’, two poems written in a turbulent time when Ireland was passing from a colonial period into a postcolonial one, I will argue that Yeats’s stance towards the conflicting warring sides in both wars betrays his uncertainty as to where his loyalties belong. While Yeats is thought to have supported the Irish Free State against the republicans, his poem on the Irish civil war between these two opposite sides shows no preference for either side. Both are treated equally and both are held responsible for the present chaotic state of the country. Moreover, ‘Meditations in Time of Civil War’ is not wholeheartedly a lamentation for a glorious bygone Anglo-Irish past, though at first it might look to support such a

reading. The poet is not only blaming the two opposite sides which claimed to be fighting to free Ireland from the colonial yoke, but also is rebuking a colonial tradition which has contributed to a murderous present. Likewise 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen' is not just a condemnation of atrocities carried out by the colonial forces; it also points an accusing finger at the nationalists whose utopian ideals have turned out to be disastrous for Ireland. This lack of belonging to either side of the two wars and being torn between opposite allegiances refers to Yeats's conflicted colonial identity, as, unable to make a final stance, he could identify with and feel detached from both sides of these wars.

Chapter five discusses the last decade of Yeats's life, which were highly active and prolific years for the old poet. Like with other periods of his long career, Yeats explored different and miscellaneous themes and subject-matters in his works. In this chapter after giving a summary of the old Yeats's various interests and preoccupations, I will turn to the highly controversial question of his late politics. Depending on the literary texts and personal utterances we choose to concentrate on, two opposite views of the old poet appear. On the one side we see a defender of civil liberties, individuals' rights and toleration; on the other we have a war-mongering, violence-preaching and supporter of authoritative government. In his senate speeches and in some of his late poetry and prose Yeats acted as an unremitting critic of the newly and partially postcolonial Irish government for its violation of civil rights and freedoms. However, his own reactionary tendencies such as his vehement support for an anti-democratic form of government, his intense inclination towards eugenics, and finally his constant praise of war and bloodshed are manifested in some of his late poetry and prose. To describe the late Yeats in colonial terms, one can define him as a true anti/postcolonial poet or a poet with colonialist mentality. My main argument in this chapter, however, is that the existence of two opposed versions of the old Yeats, both in the poet's own works and among critics, should warn us against any monolithic and one-sided approach to him and his work. To approach the late Yeats from a postcolonial view, it will be more enabling and productive to take into consideration the tensions, circularities, uncertainties and ambiguities, which were part

and parcel of his thoughts and beliefs. The dual attitudes the old poet displayed in the last decade of his career, finally, could be interpreted as a last sign of his hybrid colonial status. In addition to the two main primary texts covered in this chapter, that is, Yeats's Senate speeches and his miscellany *On The Boiler*, I will discuss briefly some poetry from his late collections such as 'Blood and the Moon' and 'Parnell's Funeral'.

The conclusion to this thesis will summarize the argument of the previous chapters. In addition to offering a general overview of the main points discussed in this study, the concluding part will briefly point to the contributions that postcolonial theory and a postcolonial approach can offer both to Yeats criticism and to us as readers, and how it can enrich and broaden our understanding of this great poet.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> *Dictionary of Irish Literature*, Revised and Expanded Edition, M-Z. Editor-in Chief, Robert Hogan (London: Aldwych Press, 1996), 1267.

<sup>2</sup> David Pierce, ed., *W.B. Yeats Critical Assessments*, vol. 1 (Mountfield, East Sussex: Helm Information, 2000), 16.

<sup>3</sup> Auden's dismissing remark is quoted in eds., James Hall and Martin Steinmann, *The Permanence of Yeats* (New York: Collier Books, 1961), 309. The pioneering book which explored Yeats's interactions with magical and occult lores was Virginia Moore's *The Unicorn: William Butler Yeats' Search for Reality* (New York: Macmillan, 1954). For the importance of magic in Yeats's early works see: Mary Catherine Flannery, *Yeats and Magic: The Earlier Works* (Gerrards Cross: Smythe, 1977). For Yeats's interactions with Golden Dawn see George Mills Harper, *Yeats's Golden Dawn: the Influence of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn on the Life and Art of W. B. Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1974), see also Kathleen Raine, *Yeats, the Tarot and the Golden Dawn*, 2nd ed. (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1976). For a study of Yeats and different occult traditions see, Harbans Rai Bachchan, *W. B. Yeats and Occultism: a Study of his Works in Relation to Indian Lore, the Cabbala, Swedenborg, Boehme, and Theosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1965), see also George Mills Harper, ed., *Yeats and the Occult* (London: Macmillan, 1976) and Frank Kinahan, *Yeats, Folklore, and Occultism: Contexts of the Early Work and Thought* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988). For further reading see Gwladys V. Downes, 'W. B. Yeats and the Tarot', in eds., Robin Skelton and Ann Saddlemyer, *The World of W. B. Yeats: Essays in Perspective* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1965), 67-69, George Mills Harper, *W. B. Yeats and W.T. Horton: The Record of an Occult Friendship* (New Jersey, Humanities Press, 1980), Graham Goulden Hough, *The Mystery Religion of W.B. Yeats* (Sussex: Harvester, 1984), Kathleen Raine, *Yeats the Initiate: Essays on Certain Themes in the Work of W.B. Yeats* (Portlaoise: Dolmen, 1986), and William T. Gorski, *Yeats and Alchemy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> For Yeats and Irish folklore see Michael B. Yeats, 'W. B. Yeats and Irish Folk Song', in *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, 31:2 (June, 1966), 153-78, Steven D. Putzel, 'Towards an Aesthetic of Folklore and Mythology: W. B. Yeats, 1888-1895', in *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, 44 (1980), 105-30, Mary Helen Thuente, *W.B. Yeats and Irish Folklore*, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1980), Birgit Bramsbäck, *Folklore and W.B. Yeats: The Function of Folklore Elements in Three Early Plays* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1984), and Frank Kinahan, *Yeats, Folklore and Occultism: Contexts of the Early Work and Thought* (Boston; London: Unwin Hyman, 1988). For Yeats' relationship with what came to be known as Celtic or Irish Literary Revival see G. J. Watson, *Irish Identity and the Literary Revival: Synge, Yeats, Joyce and O'Casey*. 2nd ed. Critical Studies in Irish Literature, vol. 4 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994), Yug Mohit Chaudhry, *Yeats: the Irish Literary Revival and the Politics of Print* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2001), and

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Gregory Castle, *Modernism and the Celtic revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). On Yeats's interactions with Anglo-Irish Literature and tradition see Peter Faulkner, 'Yeats and the Irish Eighteenth Century', in ed., Liam Miller, *The Dolmen Press Yeats centenary Papers* (Dublin: the Dolmen Press, 1968), 109-24. Peter Ure, *Yeats and Anglo-Irish Literature: Critical Essays*, C. J. Rawson, ed. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1974), Adrian Frazier, 'The Ascendancy Poetry of W.B. Yeats', in *Sewanee Review*, 88 (Winter, 1980), 67-85, F.S.L. Lyons, 'Yeats and the Anglo-Irish Twilight', in eds., Oliver MacDonagh, W.F. Mandle, and Pauric Travers, *Irish Culture and Nationalism, 1750-1950* (London: Macmillan, 1983), 212-38, Donald T. Torchiana, *W. B. Yeats & Georgian Ireland* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1992), Colin Meir, *The Ballads and Songs of W. B. Yeats: The Anglo-Irish Heritage in Subject and Style* (London: Macmillan 1974), and R.F. Foster, 'Protestant Magic: W. B. Yeats and the Spell of Irish History', in ed., Jonathan Allison, *Yeats's Political Identities: Selected Essays* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), 83-105.

<sup>5</sup> For a study of the history and origin of Abbey Theatre and Yeats's role both as a playwright and a theatre manager in it see Adrian Frazier, *Behind the Scenes: Yeats, Horniman and the Struggle for the Abbey Theatre* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1990). For Yeats as a playwright and a man of theatre see Peter Ure, *Yeats the Playwright: A Commentary on Character and Design in the Major Plays* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), David R. Clark, *W. B. Yeats and the Theatre of Desolate Reality* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1965), Leonard E. Nathan, *The Tragic Drama of William Butler Yeats: Figures in a Dance* (New York; London: Columbia University Press, 1965), John Rees Moore, *Masks of Love and Death: Yeats as Dramatist* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), Robert O'Driscoll and Lorna Reynolds, eds., *Yeats and the Theatre* (London: Macmillan, 1975), George Mills Harper, *The Mingling of Heaven and Earth: Yeats's Theory of Theatre* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1975), Liam Miller, *The Noble Drama of W.B. Yeats* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1977), Andrew Parkin, *The Dramatic Imagination of W.B. Yeats* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978), Karen Dorn, *Players and Painted Stage: The Theatre of W.B. Yeats* (Brighton: Harvester, 1984), and Nicholas Meihuizen, *Yeats and the Drama of Sacred Space* (Amsterdam & Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1998). For Yeats and Japanese Noh drama see Hiro Ishibashi, *Yeats and the Noh: Types of Japanese Beauty and Their Reflection in Yeats's Plays*, in ed., Anthony Kerrigan, no. vi. of *The Dolmen Press Yeats Centenary Papers*, 1966. Akhtar Qamber, *Yeats and the Noh: With Two Plays for Dancers by Yeats and Two Noh Plays* (New York: Weatherhill, 1974), Richard Taylor, *The Drama of W.B. Yeats: Irish Myth and the Japanese No* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1976), Masaru Sekine, Christopher Murray et al, eds. *Yeats and the Noh: A Comparative Study*, *Irish Literary Studies*, 38 (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1990), and Yasunari Takahashi, 'The Ghost Trio: Beckett, Yeats, and Noh', in ed., Yoshihiko Ikegami, *The Empire of Signs: Semiotic Essays on Japanese Culture* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 1991), 257-67.

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<sup>6</sup> Anna MacBride White and A. Norman Jeffares, eds. *Always Your Friend: The Donne-Yeats Letters 1898-1938* (London: Pimlico, 1993), 434.

<sup>7</sup> For an extensive study about the effects of Nietzsche's ideas on Yeats's works see Otto Bohlmann, *Yeats and Nietzsche: An Exploration of Major Nietzschean Echoes in the Writings of William Butler Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1982). See also Rosemarie Battaglia, 'Yeats, Nietzsche, and the Aristocratic Ideal', in *College Literature*, 13:1 (1986), 88-94, Keith M. May, *Nietzsche and Modern Literature: Themes in Yeats, Rilke, Mann, and Lawrence* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), and Michael Valdez Moses, 'The Rebirth of Tragedy: Yeats, Nietzsche, the Irish National Theatre, and the Anti-Modern Cult of Cuchulain', in *Modernism/Modernity*, 11.3 (2004), 561-79. For Yeats and Balzac see the followings: Carl Benson, Yeats and Balzac's 'Louis Lambert', in *Modern Philology*, 49:4 (May, 1952), 242-47, Peter G. Christensen, 'Yeats and Balzac's 'Sur Catherine de Médicis'', in *Modern Language Studies*, 19:4. (Autumn, 1989), 11-30, and W. J. McCormack, *Dissolute Characters: Irish Literary History through Balzac, Sheridan Le Fanu, Yeats and Bowen* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993). For Yeats and the German poet Goethe see Marjorie Perloff, 'Yeats and Goethe', in *Comparative Literature*, 23:2 (Spring, 1971), 125-40, and J. M. van der Laan, 'Goethe, Hesiod, and Yeats on Progress', in *Neophilologus*, 88 (2004), 405-16. For the influence of the great English romantic poet William Blake on Yeats's ideas and works see Margaret Rudd, *Divided image: A Study of William Blake and W.B. Yeats* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953). See also Hazard Adams, *Blake and Yeats: The Contrary Vision* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1955), Kathleen Raine, *From Blake to 'A Vision'* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1979), and 'Yeats's Debt to Blake', *Yeats the Initiate: Essays on Certain Themes in the Work of W. B. Yeats* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1986), 82-105. For Yeats and Shelley see George Bornstein, *Yeats and Shelley* (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1970). For a study of the European dimensions of Yeats's works see A. Norman Jeffares, ed., *Yeats the European* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1989). See also Patrick J. Keane, *Yeats's Interactions with Tradition* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987).

<sup>8</sup> For a selected and chronological list of criticism on Yeats and his contemporaries see the following: Clifford Bax, *Florence Farr, Bernard Shaw and W. B. Yeats* (Dublin: Cuala Press, 1941), Arland Ussher, *Three Great Irishmen: Shaw, Yeats, Joyce* (New York: Biblio and Tannen, 1968), Richard Ellmann, *Eminent Domain: Yeats among Wilde, Joyce, Pound, Eliot and Auden* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), and *Four Dubliners: Wilde, Yeats, Joyce, and Beckett* (London: Hamilton, 1987), Thomas Flangan, 'Yeats, Joyce, and the Matter of Ireland', in *Critical Inquiry*, 2:1 (Autumn, 1975), 43-67, Craig Cairns, *Yeats Eliot, Pound and the Politics of Poetry* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1982), Lucy McDiarmid, *Saving Civilization: Yeats, Eliot, and Auden between the Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), Ian Fletcher, *W.B. Yeats and His Contemporaries*, (Brighton: Harvester, 1987), Joann Gardner, *Yeats and the Rhymers' Club: A Nineties' Perspective* (New York: P. Lang, 1989), Michael North, *The Political Aesthetic of*

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<sup>9</sup> For informative discussions about Yeats's love poetry, his portrayals of women, gender and sex in his poems see Elizabeth Butler Cullingford, *Gender and History in Yeats's Love Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) and 'At the Feet of the Goddess: Yeats's Love Poetry and the Feminist Occult', in ed., Deirdre Toomey, *Yeats and Women, Yeats Annual*, 9 (1992), 31-59, Catherine Cavanaugh, *Love and Forgiveness in Yeats's Poetry* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1986), Marjorie G. Perloff, 'Heart Mysteries': The Later Love Lyrics of W. B. Yeats', in *Contemporary Literature*, 10:2 (Spring, 1969), 266-83, Catherine Lynette Innes, *Woman and Nation in Irish Literature and Society, 1880-1935* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993), Gloria C. Kline, *The Last Courtly Lover: Yeats and the Idea of Woman*, (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1983), Hedwig Schadwall, 'Sexual and Textual Politics in Yeats's *The Player Queen*', in eds., Peter Liebrechts and Peter van de Kamp, *Tumult of Images: Essays on W.B. Yeats and Politics* (Amsterdam-Atlanta: Rodopi, 1995), 85-107, Marjorie Elizabeth Howes, *Yeats's Nations: Gender, Class, and Irishness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Marjorie Perloff, 'Between Hatred and Desire: Sexuality and Subterfuge in 'A Prayer for My Daughter'', in ed., Warwick Gould, *Yeats Annual*, 7 (1990), 29-50, and Terry Eagleton, 'Politics and Sexuality in W. B. Yeats', in *Crane Bag* 9:2 (1985), 138-42. For a Collection of essays on Yeats and women see ed., Deirdre Toomey *Yeats Annual*, 9, *Yeats and Women*, A Special Number (1992). For Yeats and Maud Gonne see Jalal Uddin Khan, 'Yeats and Maud Gonne: (Auto) Biographical and Artistic Intersection', in *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 22, The Language of the Self: Autobiographies and Testimonies (2002), 127-47, E.Heine, 'Yeats and Maud Gonne: Marriage and the Astrological Record, 1908-09', in ed., Warwick Gould, *Yeats Annual*, 13 (1998), 3-33, and Herbert J. Levine, 'Freeing the Swans': Yeats's Exorcism of Maud Gonne', in *ELH*, 48:2 (Summer, 1981), 411-26. For Yeats and Olivia Shakespeare see John Harwood, *Olivia Shakespeare and W. B. Yeats: After Long Silence* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989).

<sup>10</sup> For the influences of East on Yeats's work see Shamsul Islam, 'The Influence of Eastern Philosophy on Yeats's later poetry', in *Twentieth Century Literature*, 19:4 (October., 1973), 283-90, Bruce M. Wilson, 'From Mirror after Mirror': Yeats and Eastern Thought, in *Comparative Literature*, 34:1 (Winter, 1982), 28-46, Komesu Okifumi, *The Double Perspective of Yeats's Aesthetic* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe,

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<sup>11</sup> For Yeats and Romanticism see Edmund Wilson, 'W.B. Yeats', in *Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930* (London: Fontana, 1961), 28-57, Graham Goulden Hough, *The Last Romantics* (London: Duckworth, 1949), Northrop Frye, 'The Rising of the Moon: A Study of *A Vision*', in eds., Denis Donoghue and J. R. Mulryne, *An Honoured Guest: New Essays on W. B. Yeats* (London: Edward Arnold, 1965), 8-33, Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957), James Land Jones, *Adam's Dream: Mythic Consciousness in Keats and Yeats* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1975), George Bornstein, *Transformations of Romanticism in Yeats, Eliot and Stevens* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1976), George Mills Harper, "'Out of a medium's mouth': Yeats's Theory of Transference and Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale'", in ed., Richard J. Finneran, *Yeats: An Annual of Critical and Textual Studies* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1983), 17-32, Anthony L. Johnson, 'Yeats and the Major Romantic Poets', in ed., David Pierce, *W. B. Yeats Critical Assessments*, vol. 4 (Mountfield, East Sussex: Helm Information, 2000), 624-35, and George Bornstein, 'Yeats and Romanticism', in eds., Marjorie Howes and John Kelly, *The Cambridge Companion to W. B. Yeats* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 19-35. For a chronological list of the literary criticism on Yeats and Modernism see Christian Karlson Stead, *The New Poetics: Yeats to Eliot* (London: Hutchinson, 1964), Christian Karlson Stead, *Pound, Yeats, Eliot and the Modernist Movement* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), James Longenbach, *Stone Cottage: Pound, Yeats, & Modernism* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), Leon Surette, *The Birth of Modernism: Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats, and the Occult* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), Stan Smith, *Origins of Modernism: Eliot, Pound, Yeats and the Rhetorics of Renewal* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), Michael Tratner, *Modernism and Mass Politics: Joyce, Woolf, Eliot, Yeats* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), Terri A. Mester, *Movement and Modernism: Yeats, Eliot, Lawrence, Williams, and Early Twentieth Century Dance* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1997), Daniel Albright, *Quantum Poetics: Yeats, Pound, Eliot, and the Science of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), Donald J. Childs, *Modernism and Eugenics: Woolf, Eliot, Yeats, and the Culture of Degeneration*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), Catherine E. Paul, *Poetry in the Museums of Modernism: Yeats, Pound, Moore, Stein* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), Richard Greaves, *Transition, Reception and Modernism in W. B. Yeats*, (New



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<sup>12</sup> For critics who have criticized and disparaged Yeats's political views see Yvor Winters, 'The Poetry of W. B. Yeats', in *Twentieth Century Literature*, 6:1 (April 1960), 3-24, Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'An Unhealthy Intersection', in *New Review*, 2:16 (1975), 3-8, Seamus Deane, 'Yeats and the Idea of Revolution', *Celtic Revivals* (London and Boston: Faber, 1985), 38-50, and 'Remembering the Irish Future', in *Crane Bag*, 8:1 (1984), 81-92, Declan Kiberd, 'Inventing Irelands', in *Crane Bag*, 8:1 (1984), 11-25, Richard Kearney, 'Myth and Terror', in *Crane Bag*, 2.1-2 (1978), 125-39, Patrick Kavanagh, 'William Butler Yeats', in ed., David Pierce, *W.B. Yeats Critical Assessments*, vol. 3 (Mountfield, East Sussex: Helm Information, 2000), 61-3, John R. Harrison, *The Reactionaries: Yeats, Lewis, Pound, Eliot, Lawrence: A Study of Anti-Democratic Intelligentsia* (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), Donald Davie, *Trying to Explain* (Manchester: Carcanet New Press, 1980), and Sheila Ann Murphy, 'William Butler Yeats: Enemy of the Irish People', in *Literature and Ideology*, 8 (Dublin and Montreal, 1971), 15-30. For a criticism which is sympathetic to Yeats's politics see Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), Elizabeth Cullingford, *Yeats, Ireland and Fascism* (London: Macmillan, 1981), Malcolm Brown, *The Politics of Irish Literature: from Thomas Davis to W. B. Yeats* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1972), Donald Torchiana, *Yeats & Georgian Ireland*, (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1992), Peter Costello, *The Heart Grown Brutal: The Irish Revolution in Literature from Parnell to the Death of Yeats, 1891-1939* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1977), P. S. O'Hegarty, 'W.B. Yeats and Revolutionary Ireland of His Time', in *Dublin Magazine* (July-September, 1939), 22-24, and Edward W. Said, 'Yeats and Decolonization', in *Culture and Imperialism*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), 265-88. For a more comprehensive and balanced criticism of Yeats's politics see Michael North, *The Political Aesthetic of Yeats, Eliot and Pound*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), Paul Scott Stanfield, *Yeats and Politics in 1930s* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), Allison, Jonathan, ed. *Yeats's Political Identities: Selected Essays* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), George Mills Harper, 'Intellectual Hatred' and 'Intellectual Nationalism': The Paradox of Passionate Politics', in ed., Richard Finneran, *Critical Essays on W. B. Yeats* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1986), 152-70, and F.S.L. Lyons, 'Yeats and Victorian England', in ed., A. Norman Jeffares, *Yeats, Sligo and Ireland: Essays to Mark the 21st Yeats International Summer School*, (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1980), 115-38. For the critics who have condemned Yeats as having Fascist sympathies see Donald Davie, 'A Fascist Poem: Yeats's 'Blood and the Moon'', in *Trying to Explain* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1979), 165-73, W. J. McCormack, *Ascendancy and Tradition in Anglo-Irish Literary History from 1789 to 1939* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), Conor Cruise O'Brien 'Passion and Cunning: An Essay on the Politics of W. B. Yeats', in eds., A. Norman Jeffares and K. G. W. Cross, *In Excited Reverie* (London, Macmillan, 1965), 207-78. For critics who have tried to defend Yeats

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<sup>13</sup> For Yeats and English culture see Vinod Sena, 'W.B. Yeats, Mathew Arnold and the Critical Imperative', in *The Victorian Newsletter*, 56 (1979), 10-14, Linda Dowling, *Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin de Siecle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), Timothy Webb, 'Yeats and the English', in eds., Joseph McMinn, Anne McMinn and Angela Welch, *The Internationalism of Irish Literature and Drama*, (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1992), 232-54, David Pierce, *Yeats's Worlds: Ireland, England the Poetic Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), and T. McAlindon, 'Yeats and the English Renaissance', in *PMLA*, 82:2 (May, 1967), 157-69. For Yeats and the process of composition and revision in his writings see A. Norman Jeffares, 'W.B. Yeats and his Methods of Writing Verse', in *The Nineteenth Century and After*, 139: 829 (March, 1946), 123-8, Giorgio Melchiori, *The Whole Mystery of Art: Pattern into Poetry in the Work of W.B. Yeats* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1960), Jon Stallworthy, *Between the Lines: Yeats's Poetry in the Making* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), and *Vision and Revision in Yeats's Last Poems*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), Curtis R. Bradford, *Yeats at Work* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), Helen Vendler, 'Technique in the Earlier Poems of Yeats', in ed., Warwick Gould, *Yeats Annual*, 8 (1991), 3-20, and Warwick Gould, 'W. B. Yeats and the Resurrection of the Author', in *The Library*, 16:2 (June, 1994), 101-34. For Yeats's prose see Augustine Martin, 'The Secret Rose and Yeats's Dialogue with History', in *Ariel*, 3:3 (July, 1972), 91-103, Richard J. Finneran, *The Prose Fiction of W.B. Yeats: The Search for 'those simple forms'* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1973), William H. O'Donnell, *A Guide to the Prose Fiction of W. B. Yeats* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983), and Steven Putzel, *Reconstructing Yeats: 'The Secret Rose' and 'The Wind Among the Reeds'* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1986).

<sup>14</sup> See for example James Hall & Martin Steinmann, eds., *The Permanence of Yeats: Selected Criticism* (New York: Macmillan, 1950), John Unterecker, ed., *Yeats: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963), D. E. S. Maxwell and Suheil B. Bushrui, eds., *W.B. Yeats, 1865-1965: Centenary Essays on the Art of W.B. Yeats* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1965), Robin Skelton & Ann Saddlemeier, eds., *The World of W. B. Yeats, Essays in Perspective* (Dublin: Dolmen Press 1965), A. N. Jeffares and K. W. Cross, eds., *In Excited Reverie: A Centenary Tribute to William Butler Yeats 1865-1939* (London: Macmillan 1965), Liam Miller, ed., *The Dolmen Press Yeats Centenary Papers* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1968), W. H. Pritchard, *W. B. Yeats, A Critical Anthology* (London: Penguin 1972), Patrick J. Keane, ed. *William Butler Yeats: A Collection of Criticism* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), Richard J. Finneran, ed., *Critical Essays on W. B. Yeats* (Boston: G. K. Hall

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<sup>15</sup> The first official biography of Yeats was written shortly after the poet's death by Joseph M. Hone, *W. B. Yeats 1865-1939* (London: Macmillan 1942). Since then a number of biographies and biographical studies of Yeats has followed, see for example A. Norman Jeffares, *W. B. Yeats: Man and Poet* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949), Richard Ellmann, *Yeats: The Man and the Masks* (New York: Dutton, 1958), Frank Tuohy, *Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1976), A. Norman Jeffares, *W. B. Yeats: A New Biography* (London: Hutchinson, 1988), Alasdair D. F. Macrae, *Yeats: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), Stephen Coote, *W. B. Yeats: A Life* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1997), Keith Aldritt, *W. B. Yeats: The Man and the Milieu* (London: John Murray, 1997), Terence Brown, *The Life of W. B. Yeats: A Critical Biography* (Blackwell Publishing, 1999), Brenda Maddox, *George's Ghosts: A New Life of W. B. Yeats* (London: Picador, 2000) and finally R. F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life, I: 'The Apprentice Mage'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), *W. B. Yeats: A Life, II: The Arch-Poet 1915-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>16</sup> The two sides of this argument are represented by Edward Said's 'Yeats and Decolonization', in *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), 265-88, and Seamus Deane's 'Yeats and the Idea of Revolution', in *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature 1880-1980* (London: Faber, 1987), 38-50. A review of their versions of Yeats will follow in the next chapter.

<sup>17</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 120.

<sup>18</sup> See for example Hazard Adams, 'Yeats and Antithetical Nationalism', in *Yeats's Political Identities: Selected Essays*, Allison, Jonathan, ed. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 309-24, Rebecca Weaver, "W. B. Yeats's Imagined East and Ireland in the Postcolonial Context", and Cristina J. Thaut, "The 'Rough Beast': A Postcolonial and Postmodern Yeats", in *W. B. Yeats and Postcolonialism*, Deborah Fleming, ed. (West Cornwall, CT: Locust Hill Press, 2001), 301-29, 3-25.

<sup>19</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 71.

<sup>20</sup> Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics* (London: Verso, 1997), 116.

<sup>21</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, 'Foreword: Remembering Fanon', *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon (London: Pluto Press, 1986), vii-xxv, ix.

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<sup>22</sup> Edward W. Said, 'Yeats and Decolonization', *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), 265-88, 275, Seamus Deane, *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature 1880-1980* (London: Faber, 1987), 48, Homi K. Bhabha, 'Foreword: Remembering Fanon', *Black Skin, White Masks*, vii-xxv, xvii-xviii.

<sup>23</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 109.

<sup>24</sup> Stephen Slemon, 'Unsettling the Empire: Resistance Theory for the Second World.' *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, Bill Aschcroft, Gareth Griffith, and Helen Tiffin, eds. (London: Routledge, 1995), 104-11, 109-10.

<sup>25</sup> James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (St Albans: Triad, 1977), 172.

<sup>26</sup> Seamus Deane, 'Heroic Styles: The Tradition of an Idea', in ed., Claire Connolly, *Theorizing Ireland* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 14-26, 18

<sup>27</sup> Deborah Fleming, 'Introduction', *W.B. Yeats and Postcolonialism*, (West Cornwall, CT: Locust Hill Press, 2001), xiii-xxix, xvii.

<sup>28</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 132.

## **POSTCOLONIALISM, IRELAND, AND YEATS**

### **POSTCOLONIALISM AND THE QUESTION OF IRELAND**

To approach W.B. Yeats from the viewpoint of postcolonial criticism is to move on slippery ground. In general, Yeats's works have always aroused much critical disagreement and unresolved debate. When it comes to his political beliefs, and it cannot be denied that politics is an inseparable part of his life, which also plays an important role in a considerable number of his works, this debate turns out to be more severe and complicated. As Ireland's pre-eminent national poet he has become a touchstone for his country's postcoloniality. Most often a discussion of Yeats's colonial or postcolonial status is embedded in the wider question of Ireland's postcolonial status. Both the place of Ireland as a postcolonial country and the status of Yeats as a postcolonial poet are hotly debated and both depend on the way postcolonialism is defined. It is quite obvious that we cannot reach one simple definition of colonialism or postcolonialism, and indeed the huge scope of the colonial enterprise, the difference between the various colonizers and the colonized, and the diverse forms of anticolonial struggles and the subsequent different postcolonial situations in different countries have made it impossible to agree on a single, general, and applicable definition. That is why since the very beginning postcolonialism has proved itself a disputed discursive field and the problem of defining it is the problem that besets all the 'ism' terms such as post-modernism or post-structuralism. There is much ongoing debate, objection, and disagreement among critics as to the meaning(s) of the term and indeed even to its spelling: with or without hyphen. To gather all the different and often conflicting definitions of the term is not the aim of this introduction. This would be a subject for a whole book. But the most representative definitions are discussed here as a prelude to a more detailed consideration of Yeats's work in relation to postcolonial themes.

A loose, but fairly literal, definition of postcolonialism reads it as the chronological period after the end of colonialism. This definition can be and in fact has been challenged for two reasons: firstly, its simple and naïve implication that

colonialism is over, secondly, its conferring of a privilege to colonialism by implying the dependence of 'postcolonialism' for self-definition on the preceding term: 'colonialism'. Some critics have questioned the credibility of this interpretation of postcolonialism; for example, Peter Childs and Patrick Williams in *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory* remind us that a 'sense of ending, of the completion of one period of history and the emergence of another, is, ... hard to maintain in any simple or unproblematic fashion'.<sup>1</sup> Anne McClintock cannot accept postcolonialism either because the very prefix 'post' 'reduces the cultures of peoples beyond colonialism to *prepositional* time. The term confers on colonialism the prestige of history proper; colonialism is the determining marker of history. Other cultures share only a chronological, prepositional relation to a Euro-centered epoch that is over (post-), or not yet begun (pre-)'.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, Aijaz Ahmad's critique of postcolonialism complains that it subordinates the colonized people's history to colonialism.<sup>3</sup> Postcolonialism, perhaps, can best be expounded as a reaction to and interaction with colonialism that came into being since the beginning of colonialism itself.

Another explanation of the term is what the writers of one of the first and the most influential books of the field, *The Empire Writes Back*, offer: 'We use the term 'post-colonial', however, to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day'.<sup>4</sup> In another joint project, *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*, the same writers give a rather similar definition of the term: 'Post-colonialism (or often Postcolonialism) deals with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies'.<sup>5</sup> As was mentioned earlier, interaction with colonialism is an inherent part of postcolonialism. This interaction usually takes the form of questioning the values and criteria of colonialism, what Diana Brydon has called 'the rethinking of values and knowledge generated by decolonization'. For Brydon, 'postcolonialism describes the process of rethinking attitudes toward colonialism and its aftermath, including the terms and categories in which that knowledge has been cast'.<sup>6</sup> When colonialism is in control this 'rethinking of values and knowledge' leads to a reaction to the colonial rule, to resistance, another part of postcolonialism, which in the literary field is mostly enacted in nationalist writings. Another critic who cannot accept the chronological version of postcolonialism is Elleke Boehmer: 'Rather than simply being the writing which

'came after' empire, *postcolonial* literature is that which critically scrutinizes the colonial relationship. It is writing which sets out in one way or another to resist colonialist perspectives'.<sup>7</sup> Ania Loomba's and Declan Kiberd's views of postcolonialism are almost the same. Loomba believes that: 'it is more helpful to think of postcolonialism not just as coming literally after colonialism and signifying its demise, but more flexibly as the contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism'.<sup>8</sup> Kiberd emphasizes that the beginning of postcolonialism is not the moment of the occupier's withdrawal; it is, rather, 'that very moment when a native writer formulates a text committed to cultural resistance'.<sup>9</sup>

Postcolonial literature has replaced such descriptive terms as 'Commonwealth literature', 'Anglophone literature', 'New literature written in English', 'Third World literature' and 'Literature of developing nations'. At the end of "Postcolonial Literature": Problems with the Term', Paul Brians makes a comparison between these terms. After counting the deficiencies of the term 'postcolonial literature', Brians points to the shortcomings of other terms, and suggests that in comparison postcolonial literature fares better, though it is not perfect and satisfying: 'We continue to use the term "postcolonial" as a *pis aller*, and to argue about it until something better comes along'.<sup>10</sup>

The debate over what exactly postcolonialism means still continues. Pinning down a clear-cut and definite meaning as the final answer to what postcolonialism stands for, seems neither possible nor desirable. Colonial experiences have been diverse in different times and different places, as have specific postcolonial situations, and consequently perhaps we can reach to the idea of different postcolonialisms, rather than a single postcolonialism. As we have seen, definitions of postcolonialism vary widely; in general, however, there are two main definitions. The first one presents a chronological and period-based model that regards post-colonialism as a time coming after the *end* of colonialism. In this definition the prefix 'post' suggests temporality and the use of the hyphen emphasizes the break between the two periods, one that is colonial and one that is post-colonial. In the second definition of postcolonialism, this sense of discontinuity and chronological break is questioned and postcolonialism, without the hyphen, is interpreted as a longer

period, one that starts at the very *beginning* of the colonial onslaught. The prefix 'Post' in this definition is more ideological than temporal; it implies going beyond and transcending colonialism and not simply coming after it.

The chronological view of postcolonialism presupposes the definite end of colonialism, a position that is hard to maintain. The deficiencies of this interpretation of the term are already clear; the most significant objection is that colonialism in no definite sense can be claimed to have ended, it can continue in different forms and disguises, economical and cultural influences over the formerly colonized countries for instance, what is better known as neo-colonialism, or to use the ironical term which points to American ideological and cultural dominance and control over the rest of the world, 'Coca-Colonization'.<sup>11</sup> The chronological view also suggests a break in the interactions between the colonizer and the colonized in the pre-independence and post-independence periods. It is more enabling to see one significant and defining criterion of postcoloniality as ideological rather than temporal, in other words as moving beyond colonialism both mentally and ideologically rather than coming after colonialism chronologically. One advantage of such a view is that it can accommodate the phenomenon of neo-colonialism. The objective experiences of the once colonized countries reveal that in many cases after the demise of formal and militant colonialism, the grasp of domination is continued in the disguised forms of economic, cultural and internal colonialism when colonial ways of thinking still exist and circulate in these societies. If we take postcolonialism precisely as a historical period marking the end of colonialism forever, the emergence of new manifestations of colonial control cannot be accounted for. Another point to remember is that the anti-colonial movements, which start right at the beginning of the colonial enterprise, could be regarded as markers of postcoloniality, a view that is advocated by many critics.

One such critic is Jahan Ramazani, who holds that the 'concept of postcoloniality as resistance to the discourses of colonization has the advantage of recognizing the continuity of oppositional writing before and after independence and of granting political efficacy to postcolonial literatures'.<sup>12</sup> Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins offer a similar definition: 'Not a naive teleological sequence which supersedes colonialism, post-colonialism is, rather, an engagement with and contestation of



colonialism's discourses, power structures, and social hierarchies'.<sup>13</sup> And, finally, the authors of *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory* argue that 'texts which are anti-colonial, which reject the premises of colonialist intervention (the civilizing mission, the rejuvenation of stagnant cultures) might be regarded as post-colonial insofar as they have 'got beyond' colonialism and its ideologies, broken free of its lures to a point from which to mount a critique or counter-attack'.<sup>14</sup> By this reckoning, W.B. Yeats, whose writings were a lifelong attempt to construct an Irish nationality and identity against English materialism and imperialism, could be placed within the postcolonial canon.

For the purpose of the present study, and in the case of Ireland and Yeats, I find it more helpful and logical not to look at the issue chronologically and not to equate postcolonialism with the post-independence period. I am of the same opinion as those critics who see postcolonialism as starting at the outset of the colonial enterprise, and continuing after formal independence is gained by the colonized. To quote Stuart Hall: 'It (postcolonialism) is not only 'after' but 'going beyond' the colonial'.<sup>15</sup> In this sense anti-colonialism is a part of postcolonialism, but the latter is much more comprehensive and diverse, covering areas such as nationalism, hybridity, language, place, representation, resistance, ethnicity – the list can go on still further. Anne McClintock has rightly pointed out that 'Different forms of colonialization have, moreover, given rise to different forms of de-colonization'.<sup>16</sup> One can reach the natural conclusion that these 'different forms of de-colonization' have resulted in different forms of postcolonialism. In other words, postcolonialism is not a homogeneous category. To admit the heterogeneity of postcolonialism is more enabling and helpful in discussing the different cases of former colonized countries.

Ireland is one of these different cases. A colony of its close neighbour England since the middle of the twelfth century, in fact the oldest colony of Great Britain, Ireland was also the first colonized country that gained her independence (though partially and after a long struggle) in the twentieth century (twenty-six counties made the Republic of Ireland, while the six northern counties comprising Northern Ireland remained attached to England). Critical discussion of Ireland in terms of postcolonialism began with the publication of three pamphlets in 1988: Terry

Eagleton's *Nationalism, Irony and Commitment*, Fredric Jameson's *Modernism and Imperialism*, and Edward Said's *Yeats and Decolonization*. However, Ireland has proved itself an exceptional and controversial case since the very beginning. There are some factors that distinguish Ireland from other colonies of England and indeed at times make its inclusion in the former colonized and present postcolonial countries seem untenable. Because of her geographical situation as a European country, the race and the language of her inhabitants, and her collaboration with England in expanding the territories of the British Empire, Ireland has challenged and unsettled postcolonial discussions. Some critics have denied Ireland a postcolonial status for the above-mentioned reasons. Others, however, have argued for the right of Ireland to be included in the list of postcolonial countries. Like the debate over explaining postcolonialism, this is also a continuing, multi-sided and unresolved discussion. Nonetheless, several critics have questioned the validity of the postcolonial perspective when it is applied to Ireland.

Acknowledging the recent increase of academic attention to and interest in categorising Ireland as a postcolonial society, Liam Kennedy, for example, sets out to prove the opposite. Kennedy builds his argument on economical, social and political questions. He argues that Ireland's social welfare, health and educational systems, political representation in Westminster, women's suffrage, and the role that Ireland played in the expansion of and defence against the British Empire, challenge the validity of applying colonial and postcolonial conditions to Ireland. Ireland is a European country whose case can best be explained by and fitted into a European framework and not in a colonial one. At the end of his important essay, 'Modern Ireland' Post-Colonial Society or Post-Colonial Pretensions?' he asserts that his aim is not to deny the colonial experience of Ireland, but to suggest that applying a postcolonial perspective to it cannot really help us to understand the Ireland of the twentieth century: 'The argument of this essay is not that Ireland escaped colonisation nor that there is no colonial heritage to be explored. But it is arguing that an understanding of twentieth-century Ireland is only weakly aided by reference to such a perspective'. However, the gist of Kennedy's arguments is the inappropriateness of considering Ireland as a colonial case because 'colonial and post-colonial notions fit the Irish experience so poorly'.<sup>17</sup> After referring to the fashionability of studying Irish literature 'through the lens of postcolonial theory',

Richard Rankin Russell argues that ‘Given the interrelatedness of Irish literature, history, and culture, postcolonial theory and Irish literature might seem a natural marriage’.<sup>18</sup> Russell, nevertheless, emphasizes his belief that unless the Irish dependence on England, both politically and ideologically, is removed, Ireland cannot be regarded as properly postcolonial. At the present situation just political independence is gained and that only in Southern Ireland. Gerry Smyth, in turn, complies with this view. He regards Ireland as the first colony of England and also as the first country where the ‘process of decolonization’ began, but regarding postcolonialism Smyth has his own reservations; for him ‘Ireland is still decolonizing ... any description of the island as ‘post-colonial’ might be said to be premature as both ‘Irelands’ have remained fixated with the colonial link – one deliberately and doggedly, the other unconsciously and capriciously’.<sup>19</sup>

The writers of *The Empire Writes Back* do not consider Ireland as a postcolonial country at all. For them postcoloniality covers ‘all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonisation to the present day’.<sup>20</sup> It is rather surprising that while they include countries such as Canada, Australia, and the United States in the postcolonial category, Ireland is excluded from their list of postcolonial nations, as if Ireland’s culture has not been affected by the imperial policy of Great Britain. Both the U.S.A. and Ireland have been seized by the British and both have been exploited, though in different ways and to different degrees, but one is considered postcolonial while the other is not, a conclusion which is hard to maintain.

Luke Gibbons criticizes *The Empire Writes Back* for depriving Ireland of colonial status on the grounds that Irish collaboration with the English in maintaining colonial rule makes other colonized peoples reluctant to accept Ireland as a colonized nation. He concludes that this view ‘only makes sense if one identifies the Irish historically with the settler colony in Ireland, the ruling Anglo-Irish interest, thus erasing in the process the entire indigenous population - a view closer, in fact, to ‘Commonwealth’ than post-colonial literature’.<sup>21</sup> Though never an official colony of the British Empire, Ireland has suffered, in the words of Rebecca Weaver, ‘all of the systematic cultural and economic oppression of a colony’. Weaver notes that how critics consider the question of Ireland’s

coloniality depends on their prior interpretations of the term ‘postcolonial’. Therefore critics ‘who read ‘postcolonial’ as narrowly meaning, ‘after the state of colonization is over,’ argue either that Ireland was never an official colony (and therefore, not postcolonial), or that it remains colonized (and therefore, not postcolonial)’. The second group of critics, including Weaver herself, regard ‘postcoloniality in terms of resistance to un/official colonial oppression’. These critics ‘recognize Ireland’s most important and valid, though anomalous, location in the discursive and geographical postcolonial world’.<sup>22</sup>

Declan Kiberd maintains that: ‘Irish experience seems to anticipate that of the emerging nation-states of the so-called ‘Third World’’. He argues that because Ireland was the first decolonized nation in the twentieth century it is useful to compare it with other cases of decolonization. Kiberd also stresses the critical productivity of including Ireland in the postcolonial debate, which in his view ‘will complicate, extend and in some cases expose the limits of current models of postcoloniality’.<sup>23</sup> David Lloyd, in turn, regards Ireland as ‘a culture which is geographically of the decolonizing world, increasingly assimilated to that of Europe, while in part still subject to a dissimulated colonialism,’ a peculiar situation, which is best described as ‘anomalous’’. He then asserts that:

For the theory and practice of decolonization, however, Ireland is, to a sometimes distressing extent, more exemplary than anomalous. One of the earliest post-colonial nations, Ireland has largely conformed to the model of bourgeois nationalism that Frantz Fanon analysed-presciently for other nearly independent nations- in *The Wretched of the Earth*.<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps the best way to argue for the postcoloniality of Ireland is to look for its similarities with other colonized nations. There are some critics who have pointed out the common grounds between Ireland and other colonized countries. In most cases, the colonizing country, in order to justify its rule, tries to present a negative picture of the colonized as barbarians or at best as naïve peoples who are incapable of governing themselves and therefore in need of some benign and resourceful power to control them. This kind of dichotomy is the underlying principle of colonial relationships. Therefore, the colonized are considered as a homogenous group of backward nations. The colonized stereotypes regardless of their nationality have common negative characteristics, to use Loomba’s terms: ‘Thus

laziness, aggression, violence, greed, sexual promiscuity, bestiality, primitivism, innocence and irrationality are attributed... by the English, French, Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese colonists to Turks, Africans, Native Americans, Jews, Indians, the Irish, and others'.<sup>25</sup> Regarding the factor of racial difference between the colonizer and the colonized, which has been touched upon and exploited by the colonizing countries, Asian and African colonies made no difficulty, but the case of Ireland posed an exceptional problem. The Irish were white and European, at least geographically, yet the colonial outlook regarded them as inferior to the superiority of the English. Loomba recounts the observations of Charles Kingsley returning from his first trip to Ireland: 'I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country. ... But to see white chimpanzee is dreadful; if they were black, one would not feel it so much, but their skins, except where tanned by exposure, are as white as ours'.<sup>26</sup> Kingsley's shocking remarks are an example of what Marjorie Howes has noted in her book *Yeats's Nations: Gender, Class, and Irishness*. Howes tells us how the late Victorians 'drew on a constellation of images, including simian savages, lunatics, women and children' to represent the Irish.<sup>27</sup>

For Edward Said, the pioneer of introducing Ireland into the postcolonial realm, Ireland (like Australia) is a white colony. In the introduction to *Culture and Imperialism*, Said points to the cultural and armed resistance in diverse places including Ireland. He refers 'to Europe's special ways of representing the Caribbean islands, Ireland, and the Far East' among them are 'the stereotypes about 'the African [or Indian or Irish or Jamaican or Chinese] mind''.<sup>28</sup> Tim Watson, in turn, gives examples of the affinities between the Indian and Irish colonial situations. He discusses some of these similarities as presented in the works of Rudyard Kipling, the English writer whose colonialist outlook is easily discernible throughout the works he wrote about the British colonies. Watson argues that Kipling, concerned as he was with the threats to the British Empire by the revolutions in India and Ireland, surmounted this problem of 'Indian and Irish unrest by representing their forms and revising their import (as in the secret code names in *Kim*), in the interest of achieving a higher unity for that fragile entity, the British Empire'. In another work, *The Mutiny of the Mavericks*, where the discontentment of the Irish and the Indian is configured, the drunken Irish

stereotype is evoked. Kipling looks at the Irish as both colonized and colonizer, and holds that they 'will defend the borders of the Empire at the same time as they challenge its integrity and must themselves be contained'.<sup>29</sup>

The influence of Irish political and cultural resistance and nationalism on other colonized countries is another support for proponents of Ireland's postcoloniality. As it was the first colony to be decolonized after a long period of resistance in all its different forms, ranging from political parliamentary methods to armed struggle, Ireland's example became a source of inspiration and was actually followed by other decolonizing nations. Elleke Boehmer notes that the Irish case has been exemplary for other colonies. That is why, according to Boehmer, the Irish 'resistance struggle was in certain other colonies taken as talismanic by nationalist movements'.<sup>30</sup> The cultural borrowing among the colonized seems to be the basic tenet of a critic like T.J. Cribb who regards Irish literature in English as a 'paradigm for Commonwealth, and international literature in English' and as the pioneer of 'decolonizing and nationalizing literatures ... founded on an historical experience which includes the whole range of colonial and postcolonial experience'.<sup>31</sup>

The critical argument over whether Ireland fits or does not fit within postcolonial studies, like the argument over the definition of the term postcolonial, seems to be a never-ending debate. I think that although different from other colonized countries in some respects, Ireland has enough similarities with them to support the argument that it *was* a once-colonized country, though not an official one. One can focus on the differences between Ireland and other colonies and argue that as the Irish were white, Christians, at least geographically European, and acted as an agent of colonialism in countries such as India, so they can not be considered as a colony. Yet one should not forget that Ireland was conquered by the British Empire, suffered cultural and economic oppression (Great Famine and Penal Laws), and resisted colonialism in different forms from parliamentary diplomacy of politicians such as Charles Stewart Parnell and Daniel O'Connell to the armed rebellions of the nationalists in different times, for example Wolfe Tone in 1798, Robert Emmet in 1803, Pearse, Connolly and others in 1916, and the Anglo-Irish war in 1919, which led to Irish independence. It is true that we cannot reduce the

whole of Irish history merely to a record of colonialism and anti-colonialism, but at least these issues should be considered as part of that troubled history.

## **POSTCOLONIAL YEATS?**

The introduction of Ireland to the postcolonial arena should be welcomed as it enriches both postcolonial studies by extending its scope and providing the critics working in this field with new areas to explore. It will also expand and benefit Irish studies by offering critics new and fruitful perspectives to interpret the works of a considerable number of Irish literary figures. In fact there are many Irish artists whose works can be included in the postcolonial canon. Writers and poets such as Samuel Ferguson, William Butler Yeats, John Synge, Douglas Hyde, and James Joyce, just to mention a few names, dealt with the common questions that beset artists of the colonized countries, questions such as language and national identity, each one in his own different way. For example one of the central preoccupations of the Anglo-Irish Protestant poet Samuel Ferguson who was one of the literary models for the young Yeats, was the issue of national identity and the double allegiances of his hybrid colonial subject position. In his dialogical prose work 'A Dialogue between the Head and the Heart of an Irish Protestant', a title which suggests the internal conflict of its author, Ferguson ponders the insecure and in-between position of his own class in Ireland, caught in the no-man's-land, as the Heart puts it: 'tormented and enraged by the condition to which our loyalty has brought us.- Deserted by the Tories, insulted by the Whigs, threatened by the Radicals, hated by the Papists, and envied by the Dissenters, ..., and after all, told that we are neither English nor Irish, fish nor flesh, but a peddling colony, a forlorn advanced guard'.<sup>32</sup> This state of not belonging to and a lack of identification with either side of the colonial conflict does not prevent either side of the dialogue, Head and Heart, to confirm their love for Ireland and their right to be considered as Irish as the native Catholics. Referring to the history of Ireland and the successive conquerors of the country; the Celt, the Nemedian, the Firbolg, the Tuatha de Danaan, the Scot, the Anglo-Norman, Head stresses the point that '*They were all Irishmen in turn, and WE are Irishmen now*', and Heart declares that 'I know not whence my blood may have been drawn, but it circulates with a swifter liveliness

at the name of this country, and I feel and know that I am the heart of an Irishman'.<sup>33</sup>

Another Irish artist whose works can be approached from a postcolonial point of view is James Joyce. In his famous novel *A Portrait of Artist as a Young Man*, for example, the question of language, which is a prevalent issue for the colonized artist, is brilliantly put forward in the scene when Stephen Dedalus is talking with the English dean, who is lighting a lamp. The Dean and Stephen use different words to describe the same thing, while the English dean uses 'funnel', the Irish student uses 'tundish' and both are surprised at the other one's use of a word which is new to them. This incident triggers a realization on the part of the young Irish artist:

The little word seemed to have turned a rapier point of his sensitiveness against this courteous and vigilant foe. He felt with a smart of dejection that the man to whom he was speaking was a countryman of Ben Jonson. He thought: -The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are the words *home, Christ, ale, master*, on his lips and on mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language.<sup>34</sup>

Ferguson and Joyce are just two examples of Irish writers whose cases point to the suitability and productivity of applying a postcolonial criticism to Irish literature. From a postcolonial perspective William Butler Yeats offers an interesting case in study. His influence on and legacy for postcolonial writers, for instance, is more than just, say, providing a title or theme for Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. His treatment of the questions of cultural and political nationalism, national identity, English language and literary tradition, which are prevalent issues among postcolonial writers, has become the lead for some of these writers, so has been his deconstructive reading of English literary texts. Catherine Lynette Innes has pointed out the connections between the works of Irish and African writers who were engaged in creating a national literature, and has noted how there are considerable similarities between artists such as Synge and Yeats on the one hand and Achebe, Soyinka, and Okigbo on the other hand.<sup>35</sup> As with his country, Ireland, Yeats's status as a postcolonial writer has been subject to much critical



debate with different views. Some critics have regarded him as an anti-colonial poet, while others have noted elements of colonialist thinking in his works. Still another group of critics, especially in recent years, have seen Yeats as a paradigm of the postcolonial artist. In the following pages I will present a selective and representative review of these different versions of Yeats.

The first critic who interpreted Yeats as a writer from a colonized country was Edward Said. In his pioneering essay 'Yeats and Decolonization', Said depicted Yeats as 'a great *national* poet who during a period of anti-imperialist resistance articulates the experiences, the aspirations, and the restorative vision of a people suffering under the dominion of an offshore power'.<sup>36</sup> Therefore Yeats's restoration of the Irish past by bringing the national heroes to life is considered as a revitalizing force for the nationalist struggle. Said bases his argument on the recognition of Ireland as a once colonized country. For him, Ireland, like Australia, is a white colony, and what Yeats did by reviving the suppressed culture and history of his country can be equated with Negritude, Islam, or Fanon's theories, all different forms of resistance to colonialism. Right at the beginning of 'Yeats and decolonisation' Said quotes a passage from Neruda's memoirs which shows that Yeats was a defender of the Spanish Republic against the oppressive regime of the dictator General Franco. Not having enough physical strength to make it to Madrid, Yeats had actually sent a letter of support to a Congress held there in 1937 in defence of the Republic. Thus Said adds a new perspective for looking at the Irish poet:

Just as Neruda saw no difficulty in thinking of himself as a poet who dealt with both internal colonialism in Chile and with external imperialism throughout Latin America, we should think of Yeats, I believe, as an Irish poet with more than strictly local Irish meaning and applications. Neruda accepted him as a national poet representing Irish nation in its war against tyranny and, according to Neruda, Yeats responded positively to that unmistakably anti-fascist call, despite his frequently cited dispositions towards European fascism.<sup>37</sup>

This is a quotation which would certainly have surprised Conor Cruise O'Brien, who in his provocative essay 'Passion and Cunning: An essay on the Politics of W.B. Yeats' attacks Yeats with charges of insincerity, opportunism, and fascism, and discards him as a cunning and opportunist poet who always preferred his

personal interests to those of the nation. The Yeats that Said presents is, however, a nationalist poet who was always in touch with the people of his country, a poet who by restoring the pre-colonial culture of his fellow countrymen and by depicting the unavoidable violence of the fight for national independence in his poetry, prose, and drama achieves the status of a writer of decolonisation. Moreover, Said's Yeats was not only fighting against British colonialism in Ireland, but also against the wrongs of international colonialism and fascism. Said, however, says almost nothing about some of Yeats's reactionary and traditional attitudes which have made him liable to severe criticism by those critics who are not as sympathetic towards Yeats as Said himself seems to be.

Essentially opposed to Said's interpretation of Yeats is Seamus Deane's estimation of the Irish poet. While in Said's evaluation of Yeats the key concept is the decolonizing role of the poet, Deane's view is more concentrated upon the idea of Yeats's colonial complicity. In *Celtic Revival: Essays in Modern Irish Literature 1880-1980*, Deane claims that in creating and propagating the concept of a Protestant aristocracy, Yeats misunderstood and 'distorted history in the service of myth'.<sup>38</sup> As a result the imaginative Ireland that Yeats tried to create in his works was in sharp contrast to the actual reality of the country. While the aesthetics of Yeats are revolutionary, his politics, according to Deane, are traditionalist and authoritarian. The image of Ireland which Yeats invented at the beginning of his career, Deane contends, was shattered by the actual and real Ireland that he faced at its end. In devising this imaginary notion of Irishness Yeats drew on the seventeenth-century romantic conception of Englishness: 'Ireland was, for him, a revolutionary country for the very reason that it was, in the oldest sense, a traditional one'.<sup>39</sup> Deane has problems with some of Yeats's colonialist depictions of Ireland in works such as *A Full Moon in March* where he implies that 'Ireland had to die before it could be regenerated. Yet in its regeneration it became not a fascist, but a colonial, culture'. He comes to the conclusion that Yeats's 'so-called fascism is, in fact, an almost pure specimen of the colonialist mentality', although he is quick to assert that to 'describe Yeats's politics, and to a large extent his achievement, as colonial is not at all to diminish it'.<sup>40</sup> What Deane presumably means is that Yeats's artistic achievement goes beyond his political affiliations and that we should value that achievement in spite of his politics. However, regarding

Yeats's political attitudes, Deane's overall approach implies that by 'colonial' he certainly does not mean the colonized, rather the opposite connotations of colonizer or the colonizing come to mind. Moreover it is not only 'Yeats's politics' which is described as colonial, but 'to a large extent his achievement', clearly his works too.

Said's and Deane's readings and definitions of Yeats are expressive of a set of outright dichotomies, that is: Irish/English, republican/loyalist, nationalist/unionist and finally colonial/anticolonial. Neither of these two contending approaches gives sufficient attention to the intricate and heterogeneous context of Yeats's milieu and to the dialectical, multiple, and developing nature of his *oeuvre*. As a result they both tend to simplify a complex matter. What is ignored here is the complexity, the uncertainty, and the development of Yeats's colonial position. A considerable number of critics who have entered the debate seem to have followed the lead of Said and Deane by subscribing to one or other of these extreme views. Their criticisms have thus pigeonholed Yeats in a fixed either/or position. The Irish poet is either depicted as a unionist, reactionary and colonialist figure or as a nationalist, revolutionary and anti-colonial writer. Because my thesis argues against such views of Yeats I give a brief review of some of this criticism before moving to a more detailed consideration of the poet's work.

A number of critics have argued against the notion of an anti-colonial Yeats. For these critics a comparison between Yeats's ideas of nationalism with other prevalent forms of nationalism in Ireland at the closing years of the nineteenth century shows that Yeats's politics were not only revolutionary but detrimental to the *real* Irish nationalism. In fact some critics have regarded Yeats as a reactionary poet with colonialist attitudes who had more in common with the colonizer than with the colonized. Stephen Regan, for example, argues that those critics who label Yeats's early work as 'anti-colonialist' or 'anti-imperialist' do not pay attention to 'the complexities and contradictions inherent in the version of nationalism that Yeats espoused'.<sup>41</sup> Regan compares Yeats's version of nationalism with other forms of nationalism in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Seen in this light, Yeats's Celtic Revival nationalism was in fact more interrelated with decadence, English aestheticism, and Matthew Arnold's views than with the realities of the

Irish political scene. Referring to Said, Regan suggests that ‘to apply the word ‘revolutionary’ to Yeats is to adopt a limited and one-sided view of his work’, as Yeats’s cultural nationalism was not necessarily a prelude to and support for political nationalism. It was rather ‘the product of a complex set of allegiances and identities; it emerges from a deep sense of colonial insecurity and a deep sense of anxiety about the future of his own embattled class’.<sup>42</sup>

Similar to Regan’s view of Yeats is Spurgeon Thompson’s approach to the issue. If Connor Cruise O’Brien is the harshest critic of Yeats’s association with fascism, Spurgeon Thompson is the critic who more than any other insists on the colonialist attitude of Yeats. Yeats’s support for hygienic and educational measures to prevent the degeneration of the Irish people, and to shape the next generation according to those measures, are among the basic concepts propounded in *On the Boiler*. Thompson’s essay concentrates on this infamous work, written in the last year of the poet’s life along with two texts of his middle period: *Estrangement* and *The Death of Synge*. These three autobiographical works, Thomson argues, ‘represent anxieties, fears, and problems arriving from colonialist structures of feeling and reference’. If Yeats’s criticism of the new and postcolonial state in Ireland has been regarded as an index of his postcoloniality by critics such as Ramazani, then here we see a very different view. Thus Yeats’s disappointment with the ‘bourgeois postcolonial state in Ireland’ is expressed in *On the Boiler*, which reflects ‘a longing for the form of the old colonial state, for an idealized eighteenth-century aristocratic-liberal order, and for a particularly racist version of an Irish cultural and political elite’.<sup>43</sup> The effects of eugenics dogmas are obvious in *On the Boiler*. In fact many of the suggestions Yeats makes there ‘could have easily been ghostwritten by the Eugenics Education Society, on the work of whose leaders and upon whose presuppositions, as we have seen, he relies heavily’.<sup>44</sup> Thompson further hints at traces of eugenic thinking in *Estrangement* and *The Death of Synge*, and he argues that many critics, including Said, who regards Yeats as a poet of decolonization, have ignored his eugenic inclinations.

Other critics have sought to link the late Yeats’s right-wing inclinations with his conception of art. David Lloyd, for example, argues that Yeats’s authoritarian politics are consistent with his aesthetics. He points out the important role that

literature plays in cultural nationalism and in helping to shape a nation, arguing that this is what Yeats was already trying to accomplish in some of his early writings, that is, 'the project of founding and forging a nation'.<sup>45</sup> The connotation of 'forging' implies that Lloyd, like Deane, regards Yeats's understanding and version of Ireland and Irish identity as far from the real and actual Ireland and the Irish of his day. Consequently at first sight the image of Yeats as a nation maker seems similar to that of Said's, but while Said believed that Yeats's cultural nationalism was a preliminary and essential support for political nationalism, Lloyd discovers a gap or rather a rivalry between the two, and contends that the function and the role of Yeats as the national artist representing his nation was challenged and replaced by the martyrs of the Easter Rising. The connection between the anti-colonialist Yeats and his people turns into 'the poet's loss of any sense of organic connection with the nation that was founded by Easter 1916, or with his marginalization as a poet of cultural nationalism'.<sup>46</sup>

During his career Yeats engaged himself with the culture, myth, legend and literature of Celtic people, which is better known as the Celtic Revival or Celticism. A movement which occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the Celtic Revival aimed at revitalizing Irish language, history, and culture. The implicit aim of the movement was to confront and combat British imperialism by building an Irish national identity and culture as distinct from England. Writers and poets as diverse as Edward Martyn, Douglas Hyde, Augusta Gregory, Sean O'Casey and W. B. Yeats, each in a different way tried to restore Irish language, myths, legends and folklores in their writings.<sup>47</sup> Yeats's contribution to the new movement was both extensive and intensive. In 1893 he published *The Celtic Twilight*, a collection of stories in folklore, and in the Abbey Theatre he tried to promote Irish plays by Irish dramatists to contribute to the Celtic revival. His ideas on specifically Celtic attributes were hugely influenced by Matthew Arnold. Yeats's aim, however, was to use Arnold's arguments in the service of Irish independence from England, not as a justification for the inseparability of the two countries as Arnold had maintained. Yeats's Celticism, with its emphasis on the figure of an idealized peasant, has been regarded by some critics as an indication of his implicit association with the imperialist and colonial thinking. Marjorie Howes, for example, discovers a link between Yeats's version

of Celticism and the ‘particular strand of imperialist discourses on Ireland associated with Matthew Arnold’s liberal conservatism’.<sup>48</sup> Thus while Yeats’s treatment of the peasant figure ‘appears to be a move away from the imperial feminization of the colonized and towards a more viable nationalism, a close examination of Yeats’s peasant suggests that it brought him into greater harmony with the deep structures of colonial thought’.<sup>49</sup>

A more complicated view is presented by Declan Kiberd in his comprehensive book *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation*. In the beginning of ‘Yeats: Looking into the Lion’s Face’ Kiberd argues that some of Yeats’s early works have their origins in a British source because they depart from and rely on a colonial tradition that depicts the colonized as infantile and feminine. According to Kiberd ‘Within British writing, there had long been a link between children’s fiction and the colonial enterprise, which led to an identification of the new world with the infantile state of man ... All through the nineteenth century, the Irish had been treated in the English media as childlike’. Yeats’s early works, such as his poems about fairies and his early play *The Land of Heart’s Desire*, were somehow contributing to this belittling view of the colonized. Yeats’s shrewdness, however, Kiberd contends, led to his ‘growing reluctance to exploit the image of the child after the comparative success in London theatre of *The Land of Heart’s Desire*’.<sup>50</sup> But right through the essay, Kiberd makes the same claim again, this time bringing as an example a well-known poem of the middle Yeats, ‘Easter 1916’. Yeats’s comparison of the Rising’s martyrs to children in this famous poem is interpreted by Kiberd as an unwitting trivializing of the martyrs’ movement, and all this is done ‘in a time-honoured colonialist way’.<sup>51</sup> Later on, Kiberd presents Yeats as a national poet who in trying to find a method to confront the colonizer’s literary modes and to effect ruptures in its discourse, becomes alongside Whitman, one of ‘the first artists of the decolonizing world’.<sup>52</sup> Finally Kiberd concludes that all Yeats’s attempts seem to have come to nothing, since there has been a deep gap between the Ireland of his imagination, what he tried to project into reality, and the actual Ireland of his middle age. Yeats ‘started out in the conviction that texts by Synge, Lady Gregory and himself would provide the foundation for ‘the idea of a nation’: much later, he sadly concluded that he must settle for expressing ‘the individual’’.<sup>53</sup>

Perhaps the most balanced, and the most comprehensive single study of the vexed question of Yeats's postcoloniality is the essay of Jahan Ramazani, 'Is Yeats a Postcolonial Poet?' Throughout his article Ramazani presents different reasons to secure the position of Yeats as a postcolonial poet, though he also mentions possible arguments against this claim. According to Ramazani Yeats's objections to the prejudices of Irish nationalism and his ambivalent stance toward the new emerging nation anticipate postcolonial artists as diverse as Soyinka, Naipaul, Louise Bennet, Walcott, and Ramanujan. Yeats's nationalism and his role in forging the national consciousness of Ireland, his hybrid position as an Anglo-Irish man, his association with the East, his treatment of the English language, his decentering re-reading of Spenser and Shakespeare, and his restoring of the native land through his art are among the long list of cases that Ramazani puts forward in support of Yeats's postcoloniality. At the end of his essay, the 'weightiest credential in earning admittance to the postcolonial literary society' for Yeats is, as Ramazani puts it, 'the *cosmopolitan nativism* he shares with many of its most esteemed members'.<sup>54</sup> Rather similar to, though not as extensive as, Ramazani's article, is Rajeev S. Patke's essay 'Postcolonial Yeats'. According to Patke, Yeats is an exemplary case 'for the conditions of literary postcoloniality', since he 'was the first author from a colonized people consistently to apply his art to dispelling the shadow of cultural dependency by the light of his imagination'.<sup>55</sup> Once again Yeats's cultural nationalism, his hybridity, and his wrestling with the question of language are signposts pointing to Yeats's postcolonial position. Among these three issues the last one is discussed most fully by Patke. For Patke, Yeats's legacy for the postcolonial is two-sided, both negative and positive, as he puts it:

First, negatively, there is the cautionary lesson of how not to follow Yeats in matters of idealized nationalism. Second, positively, there is the creative use to which he put all his own self-divisive ambivalences; his canniness about his mixed impulses. The peculiarly contingent capability he developed across the turn of the nineteenth century teaches us to recognize how idealizations served him not as ends but as means: how nation was a circuitous path through which one reached home to one's self, how culture could elide language through symbol, and history through mythology; and how one could use fictions to forge reality.<sup>56</sup>

Critics such as Ramazani and Patke emphasise Yeats's postcolonial status but in recent years the debate has moved forward and a number of critics have trodden new paths in the postcolonial criticism of Ireland in general and Yeats in particular. Breaking away from the restricting and traditional straitjacket of binary criticism, these critics have called for a more comprehensive and more complex approach to the question of Ireland and/or Yeats and colonialism and/or postcolonialism. No longer is the issue seen in simple binary terms.

In 'Revising Postcolonialism: Irish literary Criticism, Irish National Identity and the Protestant Poet', Stephanie Bachorz, for example, challenges the prevalent application of postcolonial critique to Ireland. She believes that most of this criticism, notably the works of the nationalist project of the Field Day Theatre Company writers, Seamus Deane, Declan Kiberd, David Lloyd, and Terry Eagleton, could be aptly described as anti-colonial rather than postcolonial because of their inherent dependence on the binary system of oppositions between the colonizer and the colonized. In other words, by emphasizing and perpetuating the fixed notions of colonial identities, by not questioning the validity of the dual and opposite categories, and by simply reversing such binary oppositions of colonialism, the majority of this criticism which claims to be informed by postcolonial theory is actually trapped in and subscribes to what Bachorz calls 'the old binary oppositions 'good' and 'bad''. A truly postcolonial approach, on the other hand 'questions the old hierarchy as well as the system of binary oppositions itself. Only the questioning of the validity of such stereotypes, the finding of a solution to explain the actual post-colonial situation could thus be called 'postcolonial'.<sup>57</sup> The suggested solution of Bachorz is to use Theodor W. Adorno's concept of 'negative dialectics'. Briefly speaking, Adorno has argued that none of the existing oppositions can have a claim to representing the truth. There should be instead a negative dialectical process between them, which implies that both sides must be put into relationship with each other. To quote Bachorz:

Adorno insists that the difference between subject and object, between 'identity' and 'non-identity,' cannot be 'solved.' Instead, dialectical thinking, the acknowledgment of the gap between the two sides, can provide 'reconciliation'. Reconciliation means the acceptance of the difference as necessary ... Thus reconciliation provides a solution for this dilemma in that it does not fight against but accepts the otherness of the subject. This can only



be done by dialectical thinking.<sup>58</sup>

What Bachorz has criticized as the deficiencies of an either/or approach to the complex question of Ireland's postcoloniality, is what other critics have done with regard to the issue of a postcolonial approach to Yeats. Rebecca Weaver, for instance, interrogates the validity of a binary approach to the question of Yeats and postcolonialism. She blames the critics who try to define Yeats either as colonial or anti/postcolonial for presenting an incomplete and partial image of the poet. She contends that in order to support their one-sided arguments critics of both groups discard some parts of Yeats's work or life: 'Postcolonial critics, many of whom see Yeats as a hot-headed anticolonial, rationalize Yeats's big house poems and his later fascist-leaning political views, both seeming to spring from what Renato Rosaldo terms 'imperialist nostalgia.' Critics arguing for a Yeats with colonial sympathies explain away his early nationalist, anticolonial fervor and poetry'.<sup>59</sup> Weaver maintains that as an Anglo-Irishman, Yeats was torn between two loyalties and therefore he cannot be claimed by either side unless by two of them. This argument emphasises the self-divisions within Yeats himself, self-divisions that are then said to be manifested in his poetry. This suggests in turn that the seemingly opposite identities of the colonized and the colonizer are not sharp, clear-cut, and totally independent identities, but rather are highly intertwined and mixed. Eugene O'Brien notes that 'To speak of 'colonizer' and 'colonized' as if they were completely disparate and distinct identities, hypostasized beyond history, is to be lodged in an essentialist *Weltanschauung* which denies the hybridity and liminality that certainly should be part of the theorization of the postcolonial'.<sup>60</sup> A postcolonial artist like Yeats cannot simply be pigeonholed into either position, 'refusing to be seen as British, by stressing the Celtic and Gaelic heritage of his country but at the same time refusing to be co-opted into a decolonizing role by stressing his familial connection with the very forces of colonization'. Finally, O'Brien concludes that both Yeats and Heaney, in their own ways, attest the double position of Ireland as both colonizer and colonized: 'Yeats demonstrating the confused loyalties-religious, political and historical-that he strove to synthesize, while Heaney also complicates any simplistic opposition between colonizer and colonized'.<sup>61</sup> Deborah Fleming, the editor of the first book wholly devoted to the question of Yeats and postcolonialism, which was published in 2001, has also

insisted on the doubleness of Yeats's attitude. While questioning the limitations of Said's and Deane's approaches to Yeats, Fleming emphasizes that 'Yeats articulates much more fully than postcolonial writers the artist's dilemma in an emerging nation'.<sup>62</sup> This dilemma is the ambiguous position of the postcolonial artist who is torn between his love and hatred for English language and poetic tradition.

Bachorz, Weaver, O'Brien and Fleming are examples of the new voices calling for more embracing and enabling approaches to the complicated and anomalous case of Ireland's and Yeats's colonial and postcolonial status. Other critics such as Cristina J. Thaut and Hazard Adams have also tried to avoid an either/or categorization of the question and have emphasized the hybridity of the case. In 'The 'Rough Beast': A Postcolonial and Postmodern Yeats', Thaut traces the development of Yeats from modernism to postmodernism. She believes that Yeats's work defies any specific label and those critics who try to pigeonhole Yeats face a dilemma since Yeats could be regarded as 'Romantic, modern, or postmodern; colonial or postcolonial; or all of the above'.<sup>63</sup> Hazard Adams, in turn, has defined Yeats's case in terms of what he calls 'antitheticality'. Adams argues that Yeats's 'stance of seeking to provide a necessary antithesis rather than any consistency of doctrine or political position ... kept him getting into political difficulties and caused him to suffer assault from both of the mutually negating sides'.<sup>64</sup>

My own approach is more in line with this last group of critics as in my view they present a more complete picture of a Yeats whose loyalties as an Anglo-Irish artist wavered between the two sides of the hyphen that made his hybrid identity. He was a nationalist who, as a young and fervent poet eager to retrieve an independent cultural identity for his nation, could emphasize that 'Ireland is the true subject for the Irish' (*LNI*, 90). He could claim, on the one hand that 'the most of the best dramas on the English stage from the times of Congreve and Sheridan and Goldsmith to our own day have been the work of Irishmen', thus implying the superiority of the Irish artistic intellect over her imperialist neighbour (*LNI*, 69). On the other hand, he could not deny his own deep debt to and affection for the English literary tradition: 'I owe my soul to Shakespeare, to Spencer and to Blake,

perhaps to William Morris, and to the English language in which I think, speak and write', and he could not hide the ambiguous and hybrid feelings he nourished toward a culture, a language, and a tradition he as a nationalist artist was trying to oppose: 'everything I love has come to me through English; my hatred tortures me with love, my love with hate. ... no man can think or write with music and vigour except in his mother tongue' (*E & I*, 319-20). It is the presence of such double, divided, ambivalent, and conflicted attitudes that should make us wary of applying either/or categories with regard to the colonial identity of Yeats.

Following the line of argument these critics have taken, the assumption of this thesis is that the best way to approach the question of Yeats's postcoloniality is to take into account both sides or rather the totality of the issue, and not to be caught up in the simple binary oppositions which reflect a kind of partisanship or condemnation. Colonialism inevitably leads to a hybridisation of culture, and so a criticism that takes for granted the colonizer and the colonized as having distinct and opposing separate identities fails to discern the hybrid nature of the postcolonial situation. The complex and multi-sided nature of the field of not only postcolonial but also colonial enterprises and anti-colonial struggles calls for new readings that encourage hybridity and discontinuity. Moreover, the genealogy of postcolonial theory is itself hybrid; different ideologies and lines of resistance have contributed to its birth and development. These include sometimes quite distinct schools of thought such as Islam and Marxism or similar movements like Negritude and Celticism. While they all have a claim to the oppositional resistant campaign against colonialism, the similarities, the borrowings and the indebtedness of these ideologies, albeit in different shapes and to different degrees, pose a problem for a fixed and single oppositional postcolonial theory. When it comes to the structure of postcolonial nations, the mixed combination of diverse ethnicities, classes and genders and their separate and sometimes clashing demands, expectations and loyalties make it difficult and almost impossible to disregard the question of hybridity in postcolonial situations. Last but not least, with respect to the issue of hybridity is the very complicated relationship between the colonized and the colonizer and their mutual interactions and interdependence. As the editors of *Postcolonial Criticism* remind us: 'It is a contested fact of postcolonial criticism that no simple oppositional model can capture the relationship between colonizer

and colonized. Assimilation, integration and collaboration prolong the colonial experience. The existence of a national bourgeoisie immediately complicates any simplistic oppositional model'.<sup>65</sup>

Critics as diverse as Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, and Albert Memmi have probed the ambiguous and complicated nature of the colonial relationship. These critics discuss the reciprocal behaviour of the two colonial sides. They argue, albeit in different terms, the inadequacy of applying a fixed and simple oppositional model to the intricate relationship of the two colonial partners. One of Fanon's contentions in *Black Skin, White Masks*, for example, is that the colonized desires to set up in the colonizer's place. Although this book, as the title shows, is mostly about the black colonies, Fanon's arguments are applicable to other colonized people as well. He argues that in spite of his skin colour, in the black's psyche there is a 'wish to be white'. This leads to a self-division in the black colonized, which is 'a direct result of colonialist subjugation'.<sup>66</sup> Bhabha emphasizes the presence of ambivalence in both the colonized and the colonizer identities, when love and desire for the other are accompanied by hate and fear from the other. For him the key terms are ambivalence and hybridity, which are characteristics of colonial relationship. Describing hybridity by way of Sigmund Freud's ideas about 'the strategy of disavowal as the persistence of the narcissistic demand in the acknowledgement of difference', Bhabha emphasizes that 'the existence of two contradictory knowledges (multiple beliefs) splits the ego (or the discourse) into two physical attitudes, and forms of knowledge, towards the external world. The first of these takes reality into consideration while the second replaces it with a product of desire'.<sup>67</sup>

Albert Memmi, whose very background, that of an intellectual Jew living and writing in a predominantly Muslim colony, placed him in an in-between position between the colonizer and the colonized (in his own terms 'I was a sort of half-breed of colonization, understanding everyone because I belonged completely to no one') has also pointed out the ambiguous combination of hate and desire in the colonial relations.<sup>68</sup> Writing about the colonized Jews who were in a way colonizers as well, because they joined the French army and were willing to take on the culture of the colonizer, Memmi notes their ambivalent position:

The Jewish population identified as much with the colonizers as with the colonized. They were undeniably “natives,” as they were then called, as near as possible to the Moslems in poverty, language, sensibilities, customs, taste in music, odors and cooking. However, unlike the Moslems, they passionately endeavored to identify themselves with the French. ... Because of this ambivalence I knew only too well the contradictory emotions which swayed their lives.<sup>69</sup>

The exceptional case of Ireland, a country that was both colonized and at the same time part of the colonial power in India is another example of the hybrid status of the colonial situation. Diversity and hybridity in terms of race, language, religion, and national orientations entered Ireland with the beginning of the colonial mission. Charles Townshend is right when he writes that ‘Ireland’s bondage was certainly more complicated than simple colonial control’.<sup>70</sup> While I agree with Townshend that an essentialist and fanatical nationalism is another kind of bondage, I would like to emphasize the factors that complicated ‘Ireland’s bondage’. One of them was and still is (in the case of Northern Ireland) the co-existence of different religions and backgrounds. Not everybody in Ireland before the partition desired independence; the Unionists were bitterly opposed to the separation from England. Indeed, the Unionist resistance to a Home Rule bill was an important and influential reason, which delayed its enactment by the English governments. At the time the second Home Rule Bill was on the way, the opponents were well prepared to challenge it as they had done before. Their opposition at this time was much more serious and severe as the foundation of a citizen militia organization, the Ulster Volunteer Force in 1913 suggested.<sup>71</sup> Townshend remarks that ‘Modern historians tend to stress nationalist neglect of the Ulster question as a kind of failure of imagination, rooted in the fixed belief in the unity of Ireland and the existence of a single ‘Irish people’’.<sup>72</sup> To imagine an idea of a ‘single Irish people’ is to ignore the hybrid situation of Ireland. However, the sectarian divisions between Protestants and Catholics, Irish-Irish and Anglo-Irish should not inevitably lead us to a classified and simple binary identification of Anglo-Irish and Protestant with unionist and colonizer, or Irish-Irish and Catholic with nationalist and colonized; on the contrary, it should make us aware of the hybridity of the Irish scene, especially when dealing with in-between cases such as a Protestant nationalist like Yeats.

Yeats belonged to the minority of the Anglo-Irish whose ancestors were the colonizing settlers coming to Ireland from the reign of Elizabeth I. In the eyes of a predominantly Catholic nationalism the Anglo-Irish simply could not and did not belong to the Irish cause. In Terence Brown's words:

A nascent Irish political nationalism, predominantly catholic in complexion and Gaelic in aspiration, was increasingly prepared to view the Anglo-Irish protestant world as simply the alien culture of a garrison society. The doctrines of the Irish Ireland movement, propagated with especial force by D.P. Moran (whose idea of a 'Battle of Two Civilizations' caught a widespread mood) insisted that Ireland's authentic cultural nationalist identity was unquestionably as a Gaelic and catholic nation, in which the Anglo-Irish, English-speaking protestant could have no part.<sup>73</sup>

However, some of the most influential proponents and leaders of the Irish cause came from the ranks of the Protestant Anglo-Irish, for instance, Wolfe Tone, Thomas Davis, Charles Stuart Parnell, Lady Gregory and of course William Butler Yeats. His nationalist loyalties, however, were complicated by the Anglo-Irish background from which he descended. In other words, Yeats's stance, like his Anglo-Irish identity, can be defined in terms which might be claimed by either side of the hyphen which separates his nationality.

Another factor which undermines the credibility of an absolute and binary reading of Yeats as a colonial or anti-colonial artist is the constant change and development in his work during a long and eventful career. Yeats was continually changing, reviewing and developing his poetry and to try to pigeonhole him in any positive or negative category is to miss the point that he was always making and remaking himself. The shift in Yeats's views over the years should be taken into consideration. Even one year before his death the desire for change is unquenchable in him: 'Grant me an old man's frenzy, / Myself must I remake' (VP, 576). He was a vacillating poet with the ability to renew himself and his poetry again and again. The composition and revision of every single poem point to this constant process of making and remaking, '*The friends that have it I do wrong / When ever I remake a song, / Should know what issue is at stake: / It is myself that I remake*' (VP, 778).

It is true that oppositional readings of Yeats are a feature in almost all Yeatsian criticism, but one main reason for this is the dialectical nature of his works, which, according to Marjorie Howes ‘revolve around conflicts between opposing desires, claims and tendencies’.<sup>74</sup> Perhaps Yeats’s reaction to the Spanish civil war could serve well as a telling example of his ‘opposing desires, claims and tendencies’. In 1937, while Madrid was besieged by Franco’s troops, a literary conference was held in defence of the republican cause. The Spanish nationalist poet Pablo Neruda writes in his memoirs how numerous supporting responses to the invitations ‘poured in from all over. One was from Yeats, Ireland’s national poet; another, from Selma Lagerlof, the notable Swedish writer. They were both too old to travel to a beleaguered city like Madrid, which was steadily being pounded by bombs, but they rallied to the defense of the Spanish Republic’.<sup>75</sup> Edward Said, who quotes this incident in ‘Yeats and Decolonization’ as a support for his version of Yeats as an anti-colonial artist, would certainly have been surprised had he put it beside one of the Irish poet’s letters written at the same year of the Madrid writers’ Congress. In that letter Yeats writes: ‘I think the old Fenian in me would rejoice if a Fascist nation or government controlled Spain, because that would weaken the British Empire, force England to be civil to India and loosen the hand of English finance in the far East of which I hear occasionally’ (*L*, 881).

Any criticism trying to compartmentalize Yeats in a fixed and static category, whether identifying him either as a revolutionary nationalist and by implication an anti-colonial poet or as a reactionary unionist and therefore accomplice in the colonial enterprise runs the risk of ignoring the complex, intricate and dynamic nature of his life and his artistic output. The very basic source of this binary system of opposing ideas is the wrong question of whether Yeats was colonial or anti-colonial. This disabling ‘Yes or No’ question inevitably draws those critics who try to find an answer into confining and mutually opposed camps. Perhaps it is more liberating to change that debilitating and simplifying ‘Yes or No’ question’ into a different one, such as how much and in what ways could Yeats be considered an anti or postcolonial artist or a poet with colonial sympathies? This kind of approach allows for a more comprehensive evaluation of Yeats as it considers the poet and his works in their totality. It also avoids a normative value-ridden language that obscures the internal tensions and contradictions of Yeats’s thought

and of his poetry. Critics who try to settle the question of Yeats' bearings on postcolonialism once and forever by putting him in one of the two opposite categories are bound to ignore, whether they do so intentionally or not, some parts of the poet's life and works, and more importantly than that, the change and development in his views and attitudes which were basic ingredients of his life and works.



## NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> Peter Childs and Patrick Williams, *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory*, (Harlow: Longman, 1997), 1.
- <sup>2</sup> Anne McClintock, 'The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term 'Post-colonialism'', in ed., Diana Brydon, *Postcolonialism: Critical Concepts*, vol. I (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 175-89, 177.
- <sup>3</sup> Peter Child and Patrick Williams, *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory*, 19.
- <sup>4</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith, and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Empire Writes Back* (London: Routledge, 1989), 2.
- <sup>5</sup> Bill Ashcroft Gareth Griffith, and Helen Tiffin, eds., *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* (London: Routledge, 1998), 186.
- <sup>6</sup> Diana Brydon, *Postcolonialism: Critical Concepts*, vol. I (London: Routledge, 2000), 4.
- <sup>7</sup> Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 3.
- <sup>8</sup> Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 1998), 12.
- <sup>9</sup> Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Vintage, 1996), 6.
- <sup>10</sup> Paul Brians, '“Postcolonial Literature”: Problems with the Term', August 7, 1998, <http://www.wsu.edu/~brians/anglophone/postcolonial.html>
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup> Jahan Ramazani, 'Is Yeats a Postcolonial Poet?' in ed., David Pierce, *W. B. Yeats Critical Assessments*, vol. 4 (Mountfield, East Sussex: Helm Information, 2000), 794-813, 796.
- <sup>13</sup> Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins, *Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1996), 2.
- <sup>14</sup> Peter Childs and Patrick Williams, *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory*, 4.
- <sup>15</sup> Stuart Hall, 'When Was 'The Postcolonial'? Thinking at the Limit', in eds., Iain Chambers & Lidia Curti, *The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons* (London: Routledge, 1996), 242-60, 253.
- <sup>16</sup> Anne McClintock, 'The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term 'Post-colonialism'', in ed., Diana Brydon, *Postcolonialism: Critical Concepts*, vol. I (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 175-89, 180.

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<sup>17</sup> Liam Kennedy, 'Modern Ireland: Post-Colonial Society or Post-Colonial Pretensions?' in ed., Diana Brydon, *Postcolonialism: Critical Concepts*, vol. II, 658-71, 668.

<sup>18</sup> Richard Rankin Russell, 'W.B. Yeats and Eavan Boland: Postcolonial Poets?' in ed. Deborah Fleming, *W.B. Yeats and Postcolonialism* (West Cornwall, CT: Locust Hill Press, 2001), 101-32, 101.

<sup>19</sup> Gerry Smyth, *The Novel and the Nation: Studies in the New Irish Fiction*, (London: Pluto Press, 1997), 3, 4.

<sup>20</sup> Bill Ashcroft et al., *The Empire Writes Back*, 2.

<sup>21</sup> Luke Gibbons, 'Unapproved Roads, Ireland and Post-Colonial Identity', in ed., Diana Brydon, *Postcolonialism: Critical Concepts*, vol. I, 647-57, 650.

<sup>22</sup> Rebecca Weaver 'W.B. Yeats's Imagined East and Ireland in the Postcolonial Context', in *W.B. Yeats and Postcolonialism*, 301-29, 302, footnote 2.

<sup>23</sup> Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation*, 4, 5.

<sup>24</sup> David Lloyd, *Anomalous States, Irish Writing and the Post-colonial Moment*, (Dublin: Lilliput, 1993), 3, 5.

<sup>25</sup> Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 107.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>27</sup> Marjorie Elizabeth Howes, *Yeats's Nations: Gender, Class, and Irishness*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 18.

<sup>28</sup> Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), xi.

<sup>29</sup> Tim Watson, 'Indian and Irish Unrest in Kipling's Kim', in eds., Laura Chrisman and Benita Parry, *Postcolonial Theory and Criticism* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), 95-113, 109, 110.

<sup>30</sup> Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*, 4.

<sup>31</sup> T. J. Cribb, 'In the Shadow of Language: from Joyce to Okri', in ed., T. J. Cribb, *Imagined Commonwealths: Cambridge Essays on Commonwealth and International Literature in English* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 105-24, 105.

<sup>32</sup> Samuel Ferguson, 'A Dialogue between the Head and the Heart of an Irish Protestant', in ed., Seamus Deane, *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, vol. I (Derry: Field Day Publications, 1991), 1177-1185, 1183.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 1181.

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- <sup>34</sup> James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (St Albans: Triad, 1977), 172.
- <sup>35</sup> Catherine Lynette Innes, *The Devil's Own Mirror: the Irishman and the African in Modern Literature* (Washington, D.C.: Three Continent Press, 1990).
- <sup>36</sup> Edward W. Said, 'Yeats and Decolonization, in *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), 265-88, 265-66.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* p. 281.
- <sup>38</sup> Seamus Deane, *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature 1880-1980* (London: Faber, 1987), 32.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 47 , 49.
- <sup>41</sup> Stephen Regan, 'W.B. Yeats and Irish Politics in the 1890s', in eds., Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken, *Cultural Politics at the Fin De Siecle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 66-84, 68.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 72 , 73.
- <sup>43</sup> Spurgeon Thomson, 'Yeats and Eugenicism: The Garrison Mentality in a decolonizing Ireland', in *W.B. Yeats and Postcolonialism*, 27-49, 27.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.
- <sup>45</sup> Lloyd, *Anomalous States, Irish Writing and the Post-colonial Moment*, 60.
- <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.
- <sup>47</sup> For a history of Celtic Revival see: Jeanne Sheehy, *The Rediscovery of Ireland's Past: The Celtic Revival, 1830-1930* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980). For the role of some famous literary figures in the movement see: G. J. Watson, *Irish Identity and the Literary Revival: Synge, Yeats, Joyce, and O'Casey*, 2nd ed. *Critical Studies in Irish Literature*, vol. 4 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994). See also Gregory Castle, *Modernism and the Celtic Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- <sup>48</sup> Howes, *Yeats's Nations: Gender, Class, and Irishness*, 18.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-3.
- <sup>50</sup> Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation*, 104, 105.
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>54</sup> Jahan Ramazani, 'Is Yeats a Postcolonial Poet?' in *W. B. Yeats Critical Assessments*, vol. 4, 794-813, 813.

<sup>55</sup> Rajeev S. Patke, 'Postcolonial Yeats', in *W. B. Yeats Critical Assessments*, vol. 4, 814-26, 814.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 825.

<sup>57</sup> Stephanie Bachorz, 'Revising Postcolonialism: Irish Literary Criticism, Irish National Identity and the Protestant Poet', <http://www.gradnet.de/papers/pomo99.papers/Bachorz99.htm>

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Rebecca Weaver, 'W. B. Yeats's Imagined East and Ireland in the Postcolonial Context', in *W. B. Yeats and Postcolonialism*, 301-29, 302, footnote 3.

<sup>60</sup> Eugene O'Brien, 'The Question of Ireland: Yeats, Heaney, and the Postcolonial Paradigm', in *W.B. Yeats and Postcolonialism*, 51-70, 56.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 59, 68.

<sup>62</sup> Deborah Fleming, 'Introduction', *W.B. Yeats and Postcolonialism*, xiii-xxix, xvii.

<sup>63</sup> Cristina J. Thaut, 'The 'Rough Beast': A Postcolonial and Postmodern Yeats', in *W.B. Yeats and Postcolonialism*, 3-25, 4.

<sup>64</sup> Hazard Adams, 'Yeats and Antithetical Nationalism', in ed., Jonathan Allison, *Yeats's Political Identities: Selected Essays* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 309-24, 310.

<sup>65</sup> Bart Moore-Gilbert, Gareth Stanton and Willy Maley, eds., 'Introduction', *Postcolonial Criticism* (London: Longman, 1997), 1-72, 5.

<sup>66</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans., Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 1986), 16, 17.

<sup>67</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 115.

<sup>68</sup> Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, trans., Howard Greenfield (London: Earthscan, 2003), 12.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 10.

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<sup>70</sup> Charles Townshend, *Ireland: The 20<sup>TH</sup> Century* (London: Arnold, 1999), xi.

<sup>71</sup> For a history of Irish unionism see *Defenders of the Union: A Survey of British and Irish Unionism since 1801*, D. George Boyce and Alan O'Day, eds. (London: Routledge, 2001). See also Paul Bew, *Ideology and the Irish Question: Ulster Unionism and Irish Nationalism, 1912-1916* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994). For further reading see the following two volumes by Patrick Buckland, *Irish Unionism: The Anglo-Irish and the New Ireland, 1885-1922* (Dublin and London: Gill and Macmillan, 1972), and *Irish Unionism: Ulster Unionism and the origins of Northern Ireland, 1886-1922* (Dublin and London: Gill and Macmillan, 1973).

<sup>72</sup> Townshend, *Ireland: The 20<sup>TH</sup> Century*, 60.

<sup>73</sup> Terence Brown, Introduction to 'Cultural Nationalism 1880-1930', in ed., Seamus Deane, *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, vol. II. (Derry: Field Day Publications, 1991), 516-20, 517.

<sup>74</sup> Howes, *Yeats's Nations, Gender, Class, and Irishness*, 14.

<sup>75</sup> Quoted in Edward W. Said, 'Yeats and Decolonization', *Culture and Imperialism*, 265-88, 281.

## **‘JUST AS STRENUOUS A NATIONALIST AS EVER’, YOUNG YEATS & IRISH NATIONALISM: A TROUBLED RELATIONSHIP**

### **INTRODUCTION**

William Butler Yeats made his literary debut in 1885 when his first poems were published in *The Dublin University Review*. Yeats's early poetry was romantic and detached from everyday life. The setting was either an imaginary one, such as ancient Ireland or Arcadia, or far away lands, such as India: 'When I first wrote I went here and there for my subjects as my reading led me, and preferred to all other countries Arcadia and the India of romance' (VP, 843). In his *Autobiographies*, Yeats remembers how as a young poet he believed the true subject of art was beautiful things and 'only ancient things and the stuff of dreams were beautiful', and how he 'did not care for mere reality and believed that creation should be deliberate' (Au, 82-3). He was under the influence of English romantic poets such as Shelley, Keats, Blake, and Byron, and in his own words was 'in all things Pre-Raphaelite' (Au, 114). Characteristic themes of this early poetry are love, nature, magic, mysticism, Irish folklore, mythology and legends, fairy tales and the local landscape of his boyhood. As a young boy Yeats grew up among stories about fairies told by the family servants and wandered around the beautiful wilderness of Sligo, his mother town, a beautiful county on the west coast of Ireland. When he started to write poetry both these experiences influenced his early works.<sup>1</sup> Some of his most memorable early poetry either celebrates the local Irish landscape of his boyhood or recounts the stories of human beings meeting fairies. These include poems such as 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree', 'The Song of Wandering Aengus', 'The Stolen Child' and 'The Hosting of the Sidhe'. Many of the poems in *Crossways*, *The Rose* and *The Wind among the Reeds* collections, for example, are meditations on the theme of love. They are either about love in general and other imaginary lovers such as 'The Pity of Love', 'The Sorrow of Love', 'Anashuya and Vijaya', 'The Indian to His Love', 'Ephemera', 'Down by the Salley Gardens', or they tell of his passionate love for Maud Gonne such as 'The Rose of the World', 'When You are Old', 'He Wishes for the Clothes of

Heaven', and many others. Poems such as 'The Secret Rose' and 'The Valley of the Black Pig', and 'The Two Tress' are examples of the poems that explore occult, mystical, and esoteric visions. Yeats's fascination with Irish folklore, mythology, epic and legendary heroes is reflected in his first long narrative poem, *The Wandering of Oisín*, and lyrical poems such as 'The Madness of King Goll', 'The Ballad of Father O'Hart', 'Fergus and the Druid', 'Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea', and 'The Fiddler of Dooney'. Writing poetry, however, was not the only concern of the young poet; from the beginning Yeats was a multi-dimensional personality. He wanted to be 'a sage, a magician or a poet', and he set on from an early age to achieve his goals simultaneously (Au, 64).

Thus, with the publication of his first poems, including *The Island of Statues* in 1885, he helped found and became a member of the Dublin Hermetic Society, met John O'Leary, the respected Fenian leader, and his sister Ellen, a friendship which was to play an important part in his personal and literary career. In the following year Yeats began to write *The Wandering of Oisín*, his long narrative poem, and published *Mosada*, a dramatic poem, attended his first séance, and in 1887 began visiting the spiritualist Madam Blavatsky, joined the London Lodge of theosophy, and started to attend socialist meetings in William Morris' house. His memorable meetings with the young, beautiful and restless revolutionary, Maud Gonne, occurred in 1889. Yeats immediately fell in love with her and was later to propose several times, being each time rejected, but they maintained a lasting and reciprocal friendship and she inspired many of his memorable poems. The same year also saw the start of his joint work with Edwin Ellis on a three-volume edition of William Blake's complete work. The year 1891 was a busy one for Yeats: his first novella and story, *John Sherman and Dhoya*, and *Representative Irish Tales* were published, and along with Ernest Rhys, he founded the Rhymers' Club, a literary group which attracted young artists of the time such as Lionel Johnson, Ernest Dowson, Victor Plarr, and Ernest Radford. Moreover, he established two literary societies, the Irish Literary Society in London with T.W. Rolleston and the National Literary Society in Dublin with John O'Leary as president. In 1892 he planned to set up a Library of Ireland. The idea was to print what he saw as

important Irish books and to encourage people to read them. Despite his efforts, his plans were thwarted and he lost control of the scheme to his powerful rival, Sir Charles Gavan Duffy, an old, respectable, and experienced politician. The publication of *The Countess Kathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics* and *Irish Fairy Tales* occurred in the same year, followed by *Celtic Twilight* and *The Works of William Blake* in 1893. Membership in the Irish Republican Brotherhood came in 1896, and in the following year Yeats was appointed as the President of the '98 Commemoration Association of Great Britain, an organization which was to commemorate the centenary of Wolfe Tone's rebellion against England in 1798. It was in 1896 that Yeats met the writer whose originality he admired the most, John Synge. In the same year he also visited his longtime friend, colleague, and patron, Augusta Gregory. It was with Lady Gregory that he concentrated on collecting Irish folklore during the last years of the nineteenth century, and along with her and Edward Martyn, they formed the idea of starting an Irish theatre in 1898. This idea was later to be realized by the establishment of the Irish Literary Theatre in 1899, a precursor to the famous Abbey Theatre, which opened in 1904 with Yeats as a playwright and as a producer-manager. His controversial play, *The Countess Cathleen* and Martyn's *Heather Field*, were the first productions of the Irish Literary Theatre. During the first years of the twentieth century Yeats was mostly busy managing the theatre and writing plays including his most nationalist plays *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902), *The Hour Glass* and *The Pot of Broth* (1903), and *The King's Threshold* and *On Baile's Strand* (1904).

As the above brief overview of the early Yeats shows, a key characteristic of this period, which was an enduring one for Yeats, was the multiplicity and diversity of his preoccupations and interests: 'I had as many ideas as I have now, only I did not know how to choose from among them those that belonged to my life' (*Au*, 83). One of these concerns was Irish nationalism, which started to appear in the young Yeats's writing by his attraction towards Irish themes around 1889 when he was writing *The Wandering of Oisín*. Looking back at his first collection of poems, *Crossways*, Yeats noted that: 'Many of the poems in *Crossways*, certainly those upon Indian subjects or upon shepherds and fauns, must have been written before I was twenty, for from the



moment when I began *The Wandering of Oisín*, which I did at that age, I believe, my subject-matter became Irish' (VP, 841). His acquaintance with the Fenian leader John O'Leary, who had suffered years of prison and exile for his political activities, and his sister, Ellen O'Leary, introduced Yeats's to Irish nationalism: 'we of the younger generation owe a great deal to Mr. John O'Leary and his sister. What nationality is in the present literary movement in Ireland is largely owing to their influence' (LNI, 75).

If we take postcolonial literature as an engagement with and resistance to the colonial dominance which came into being with the very beginning of colonialism itself, then nationalism, which is a discourse of resistance and a necessary stage in anti-colonial struggles, is included in the postcolonial circle, at least in its beginning stages. Leela Gandhi stresses the point that: 'It is generally acknowledged – even by the most 'cosmopolitan' postcolonial critics – that nationalism has been an important feature of decolonization struggles in the third world'.<sup>2</sup> The question of nationalism plays a central role in the criticism which argues for Yeats's inclusion in the category of anti or post-colonial writers, and surprisingly enough in the criticism which excludes him from the same list on the grounds that his version of nationalism was irrelevant to or even distracting from the effective and actual anti-colonial struggle. The contradictions which exist in these opposing criticisms could be traced back to the hesitations and ambiguities that absorbed Yeats throughout his long career, and often came to surface in his works and utterances. The two main concepts on which I will concentrate in this chapter are the young Yeats' involvement in Irish nationalism, and his treatment of colonial stereotypes. These two issues are interrelated, as an important objective of anti-colonial nationalist struggle is to overturn the prevailing colonial stereotyping of the colonized.

My main contention is that Yeats's relationship with both of these concepts was anything but straightforward, clear-cut and fixed; it was rather characterized by constant internal tensions, vacillations and uncertainties. The period covered in this chapter includes the early years of Yeats's career, by which I mean the last two decades of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth century. In the

first part of this chapter I will discuss the vexed relationship of the young Yeats and Irish nationalism. I will argue that while he was actively engaged in nationalist activities Yeats also had his own mixed impulses, self-divisive ambivalences and hesitations regarding his involvement. Moreover, he had to cope with the charge of those who regarded his dream-laden and esoteric poetry as not sufficiently nationalist. The main text covered in this part is 'To Ireland in the Coming Times' from 'The Rose' collection. In addition to this poem, some of Yeats's early poetry from *The Rose*, and *In the Seven Woods* are discussed briefly and whenever necessary I draw on Yeats's *Autobiography*, letters, and his prose writings. The second part of this chapter deals with the issue of colonial stereotypes by which I mean the clichéd prototypes that both the colonizer and the colonized use to describe each other. I will argue that although the young Yeats set out to repudiate the demeaning stereotypes aimed at his countrymen by British colonialism, he was to some extent drawing on the same stereotypes, and moreover, in turn, he employed stereotypic terms to describe the English. In other words, although he tried hard to undermine the denigrating stereotypes of the Irish, especially the Irish peasantry, by idealizing them, he somehow, perhaps unknowingly, fed English stereotypes by holding onto and propagating the same stereotypical views about the Irish peasantry in his works. The focus of this part is more on Yeats's prose, including his writings in periodicals of the time, essays, introductions to and reviews of books and poets. Yeats's early play *The Countess Cathleen* is another primary text which is covered in this part.

As I have suggested in the introduction to my thesis, Homi Bhabha's views on the hybrid nature of colonial subjects can be helpful in discussing Yeats's colonial status. His account of colonial discourse and colonial identities offers a useful way of thinking about Yeats who exhibited changing, unstable, ambiguous and uncertain treatments of and interactions with the issues of anti-colonial nationalism and colonial stereotypes. A major contribution of Bhabha to postcolonial theory and criticism is that he has problematized the traditional concept of the fixity of colonial identities. By a thorough rethinking of the borrowings between the colonizer and the colonized, by emphasizing the interdependence of coloniser and colonised, and finally by stressing

the concepts of ‘ambivalence’ and ‘hybridity’ that, according to him, characterize the site of colonial contestation, he has argued for new approaches to cultural and national identities. In Amrohini J. Sahay’s terms, what distinguishes ‘Bhabha’s discourse within (post)colonial theory’ from the discourses of Said, Fanon, and Spivak is precisely his ‘notion of the ‘self-deconstruction’ of the colonial – the ‘postcoloniality’ of the colonial’.<sup>3</sup> As I have already noted, Bhabha believes that colonial relationships are not black and white zones wherein the identities of the colonizer and the colonized could be easily separated as two distinct entities. Rather he sees them as multi-layered, mixed and conflicted areas where ‘hybridity’ and ‘ambivalence’, the two key terms of his critical discourse, play an important role in identity formation of both sides of the colonial conflict. I think that the notions of hybridity, ambivalence, and third space offer a productive basis for a postcolonial approach to Yeats. Rather than emphasizing the opposition between colonizer and colonized, as Said’s model does, Bhabha emphasizes the border situations and the in-between subject-positions which are the sites where identities are constantly shaped and reshaped. Such an approach better accommodates the mixed, unstable, and sometimes contradictory attitudes that an artist like Yeats showed towards the anti-colonial struggle of his country. In fact there is ample evidence in the Irish poet’s life and writings to encourage this kind of reading. Finally, the key assumption of this chapter is that Yeats’s relation to and attitude towards the questions of Irish nationalism and colonial stereotypes are examples which support the hybridity of his anti/colonialist identity, and brings under question the validity and sufficiency of an either/or approach to the Irish poet.

## **YOUNG YEATS AND IRISH NATIONALISM**

The modern conception of nation and nationalism came into being in the late eighteenth century. In the course of the nineteenth century a host of criteria including language, ethnicity, and a common history contributed to the formation of cultural nationalisms.<sup>4</sup> The focus on the idea of Irish national identity as an independent unit in opposition to an allegedly materialistic Britain served as a main principle for the Irish separation from their imperialist neighbours. Tracing the idea and the emergence of

nationality in Ireland Joep Leerssen asserts that ‘the idea of nationality was after 1800 to become the main legitimizing principle for subsequent Irish separatists’.<sup>5</sup> Charles Townshend, in turn, notes that ‘The *leitmotif* of nineteenth-century Irish public life was resistance to the Union’.<sup>6</sup> The demands for change were not only limited to the political status of Ireland, but they included other areas such as the land question and the Catholics’ rights and liberties. However, the nationalists:

saw the formal political demand for separation – ‘freedom’ – as the most fundamental issue. To them, the land problem was a by-product of British power, and would be solved by the achievement of national independence. This was the essence of the United Irishmen demand, in the deathless phrase of the great republican Wolfe Tone, to ‘break the connection, the never-failing source of Ireland’s ills’.<sup>7</sup>

To say that nationalism was a lifelong passion and preoccupation for Yeats, especially in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, when he became involved actively in the field of cultural nationalism, is a truism, yet the argument for introducing the young Yeats as a poet of decolonization is based on his supposed revolutionary cultural and political nationalism. A considerable number of critics have discussed Yeats’s nationalism and have come to various and opposing conclusions as to the nature of his early nationalism, but the focal point in this body of criticism is that Yeats’s was a particular kind of nationalism. Thus his nationalism has been discussed with different interpretations and conclusions as to the role it played in the history of the Irish national movement with adjectives as diverse as ‘critical and positive’, ‘aristocratic and archaizing’, ‘esoteric’, ‘racial’, ‘revolutionary’, ‘antithetical’, ‘elitist’, the list can go on and on.<sup>8</sup> The fact that Yeats’s nationalism can be defined by so many disparate adjectives testifies to the plurality and complexity of his relationship with Irish nationalism. With regard to the colonial question of Ireland, this multiplicity, in turn, should warn us against defining Yeats by the overt binary opposition of a colonial/anti-colonial poet.

Yeats’s life and works were closely woven into, dependent on and interacted with the events of his time. He was a man of his time, a man involved in the life and the history

of his country: 'Is it that whenever I have been tempted to go to Japan, China, or India for my philosophy, Balzac has brought me back, reminded me of my preoccupation with national, social, personal problems, convinced me that I cannot escape from our *Comédie humaine*?' (*E & I*, 448) This constant preoccupation with the different issues of his time made him, according to T.S. Eliot, 'one of those few whose history is the history of their own time, who are a part of the consciousness of an age which cannot be understood without them'.<sup>9</sup> An important factor which attracted the young poet to Irish nationalism was his friendship with the old Fenian leader, John O'Leary. It was at O'Leary's urging that in 1885 Yeats joined the Young Ireland Society, an organization that aimed at the promotion of Irish nationalism through literature. Yeats was quite articulate about the importance of this episode of his life in forming his future career: 'From these debates, from O'Leary's conversation, and from the Irish books he lent or gave me has come all I have set my hand to since' (*Au*, 101). His love for the pretty and ardent political activist, Maud Gonne, was also another influential reason for his nationalist activities.<sup>10</sup> From then on he could rid himself of the Pre-Raphaelites' and English romantic poets' influence and find the true subject matter of his poetry: Ireland and the Irish.

One of the three main interests of his life, the middle aged Yeats recalls in 'If I Were Four-and Twenty', had been 'a belief in nationality' which he gradually united with his two other preoccupations: that is, 'a form of literature' and 'a form of philosophy' into 'a single conviction' (*Ex*, 263). Now in all these activities his aspiration was to create a great artistic national literature by reviving Irish mythology and a heroic past, thus uniting people by giving them a common history to rely on in their political struggle for national liberation. He considered himself as the Irish national artist whose aim was to build an art capable of giving Ireland a national identity of its own. A quotation from *Autobiographies* reveals the cultural formation project of his early years:

Might I not, with health and good luck to aid me, create some new *Prometheus Unbound*; Patrick or Columcille, Oisín or Finn, in Prometheus' stead, and instead of Caucasus, Cro-Patrick or Ben Bulbin? Have not all races had their

first unity from a mythology that marries them to rock and hill? We had in Ireland imaginative stories, which the uneducated classes knew and even sang, and might we not make those stories current among the educated classes, rediscovering for the work's sake what I have called 'the applied arts of literature', the association of literature, that is with music, speech, and dance; and at last, it might be, so deepen the political passion of the nation that all, artist and poet, craftsman and day-labourer would accept a common design? (*Au*, 193-94)

An important objective of colonialism is believed to be destroying the indigenous cultures; the colonized intellectual fights back against this colonialist strategy by reviving what he sees as the native culture of his country, though the very idea of a preserved and untouched 'native culture' waiting to be restored by the anti-colonial intellectual is problematic and is hard to maintain. Yeats seems to fit well in this position of the anti-colonial nationalist artist. Throughout his writings in the last two decades of the nineteenth century Yeats tried to restore the Irish past legends and folklores, and encouraged other writers to do the same. Most of the newspaper essays, anthologies, reviews, and some of the poems, short stories, and letters which he wrote in his early career are attempts to recover and revalue Irish history and culture as he knew them. In these works he endeavoured to build up a sense of Irishness which would entitle him to take a significant role in the Irish literary revival during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. The long list of collections with Irish themes and subject-matters published during 1880s and 1890s – *Poems and Ballads of Young Ireland* (1888), *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* (1888), *Stories from Carleton* (1889), *Representative Irish Tales* (1891), *Irish Fairy Tales* (1892), *The Celtic Twilight: Men and Women, Dhoul's and Faeries* (1893), *A Book of Irish Verse* (1895) – seem to support the view of Yeats as a Celtic Revivalist and a national artist who attempts and desires to form a national literature and culture independent of the English legacy and influence, an endeavour which qualifies him, to borrow from Fanon, as one of those 'native intellectuals' who 'decided to go back further and to delve deeper down; and, let us make no mistake, it was with the greatest delight that they discovered that there was nothing to be ashamed of in the past, but rather dignity, glory, and solemnity'.<sup>11</sup> For Yeats, Irish fairy tales and epics, heroic legends, and past traditions were like a hidden treasure trove waiting to be discovered by men of talent, and that is what he urged his fellow artists to do. Yeats believed that Irish folklore

contained 'old beautiful mythologies wherein ancient man said symbolically all he knew about God and man's soul' (*LNI*, 101). He could not approve of those Irish writers who, instead of writing about Ireland and Irish subject-matters, turned to non-national themes: 'We are not content to dig our own potato patch in peace. We peer over the wall at our neighbor's instead of making our own garden green and beautiful' (*LNI*, 106). His recurrent maxim in these years is: 'Ireland is the true subject for the Irish' (*LNI*, 90). Therefore for Yeats, 'Whenever an Irish writer has stayed away from Irish themes and Irish feelings, in almost all cases he has done no more than make alms for oblivion. There is no great literature without nationality, no great nationality without literature' (*LNI*, 103-04).

Reviving an Irish cultural heritage was not an end in itself; rather it was closely connected to the restoration of Irish identity and nationalism, with politics, and therefore inevitably associated with the colonial question in which Ireland was embroiled. In other words the cultural project of the Gaelic revival inevitably turned into a means of developing anti-colonial consciousness and struggle. Nancy Cardozo's belief that 'No revolution could succeed unless backed by a cultural revival' might seem a sweeping generalization but in a country like Ireland where the relationship between literature and revolution was quite obvious and inseparable, it surely seems relevant.<sup>12</sup> This interdependence of the political and literary fields in Ireland has created a stereotype, in the words of Seamus Deane, 'that has remained effective throughout the twentieth century ... of a country where political violence and the literary arts flourish together in ways not emulated (nor sought by) other countries'.<sup>13</sup> Years later the mature Yeats could claim how in the literary activities of his youth there was always some involvement with politics:

We and Dr. Hyde and his movement, which began three or four years later with the foundation of the Gaelic League, tried to be unpolitical, and yet all that we did was dominated by political situation. Whether we wrote speeches, or wrote poems, or wrote romances or wrote books of history, we could not get out of our heads that we were somehow pleading for our country before a packed jury' (*UP* II, 455).

And on another occasion he made the same testimony:

At the debates of the Irish Literary Society I made violent speeches. The Society was supposed to be non-political; that had been my own decision, for I had thought that whereas the Dublin Society would stagnate without politics the London Society could best hold together as an Irish meeting-place in a strange land. I never broke the rule, which applied to the politics of the hour only, but politics was implied in almost all I said (*Mem*, 83-4).

In the final years of the nineteenth century the young Yeats did not confine himself just to cultural nationalism through writing national literature and founding literary societies; for a time, he became actively involved in public political organizations and activities. He then took an active part in the demonstration against Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in June 1897, played a leading role in the Wolfe Tone Centenary memorial ceremonies as the president of the '98 Celebration Committee of Great Britain and France, and made political speeches addressing huge gatherings in Phoenix Park and Stephen's Green in March and August 1898. In the following year, along with Maud Gonne, Yeats joined the Irish Nationalist Transvaal Committee to support the Boers in their war against British colonialism, writing several letters to papers to denounce publicly Queen Victoria's visit to Dublin in 1900.<sup>14</sup> At Wolfe Tone's Centenary celebrations, addressing a huge crowd, Yeats condemned British colonialism as the direct cause of Ireland's misfortunes, and described Britain as the empire that 'has been built on the rapine of the world'. These are revolutionary utterances which, according to Jahan Ramazani, anticipated Fanon's claim that the progress and the wealth of the European colonizers were the cruel results of exploiting the colonized countries.<sup>15</sup>

The same denouncing tone is echoed in the letters addressed to the Irish newspapers on the occasion of Victoria's visit to Dublin in 1900, a visit starting on 2 April, the anniversary of the Act of Union, and the year following the Boer War which was regarded by many nationalists as one among many of the British empire's incursions into oppressed countries to safeguard her colonial interests by sacrificing other people's freedom. Yeats's suggestion is the organization of 'a great meeting ... to protest against the Union and to dissociate Ireland from any welcome that the Unionist



or the time-server may offer to the official head of that Empire in whose name liberty is being suppressed in South Africa, as it was suppressed in Ireland a hundred years ago'.<sup>16</sup> His letter to the editor of the Freeman's Journal at 3 April 1900 is a telling example of his public stance towards the Queen's visit:

Sir-Whoever is urged to pay honour to this Queen Victoria to-morrow morning should remember this sentence of Mirabeau's- "The silence of a people is the lesson of kings." She is the official head and symbol of an Empire that is robbing the South African Republics of their liberty, as it has robbed Ireland of hers. Whoever stands by the roadway cheering for Queen Victoria cheers for that Empire, dishonours Ireland, and condones a crime. But whoever goes to-morrow night to the meeting of the people, and protests, within the law, against the welcome that Unionists or time-servers will have given to this English Queen, honours Ireland and condemns a crime (*CL II*, 508-09).

The above-mentioned examples of the early Yeats's cultural and political activities could aptly be employed to justify the view of those critics who regard the young poet as an ardent literary and political nationalist trying to de-anglicize Ireland and pave the way for her freedom from the British Empire. Regarding the importance of cultural nationalism Peter Childs and Patrick Williams remind us that: 'Since it is part of imperialist strategy to destroy indigenous culture, and a major aspect of that is to refuse to allow it a past of any worth, the recovery and revaluing of history and culture has a considerable part to play in resistance movements'.<sup>17</sup> If reviving the long-ignored past of the colonized and also anti-colonial expressions and activities are among the requirements of a postcolonial artist, then these examples of the early Yeats are to his credit. However, this is only one side of a complex story. The other side is reflected in the work of the critics who have not only rejected the revolutionary and anti-colonial picture of Yeats but have read him as an opportunist and collaborationist who at best acted out of self-interest and at worst displayed colonialist inclinations and a colonialist mentality.<sup>18</sup> According to these critics a considerable part of the young Yeats's poetry was dream-laden, disembodied and consequently out of touch with reality and so he simply could not speak for the Irish and Irish nationalism. On the contrary, his call to Celticism should be regarded as a digression from the real national

cause. As early as 4 June 1898 the *Irish Weekly Independent* could attack Yeats and his Celtic movement as:

... this dreamy indefinite Celtic movement which Mr. Yeats prophesises will abolish the politicians; which will weld all classes of Irishmen together for no fixed purpose, save that of living in a dreamland, where we shall be oblivious of famine-stricken Connaught, where we shall forget Financial Relations and the absence of a National Legislature, and where the English occupation will not be too forcibly impressed upon us (*CL II*, 231).

Padriac Pearse, one of the leading revolutionaries and martyrs of Easter 1916, which Yeats would later glorify in his poetry, could describe him in such demeaning terms: 'Against Mr. Yeats personally, we have nothing to object. He is a mere English poet of the third or fourth rank and as such he is harmless. But when he attempts to run an "Irish" Literary Theatre it is time for him to be crushed'.<sup>19</sup> D. P. Moran, the famous Irish fundamentalist and a great proponent of Catholic nationalism, criticised Yeats for diverting Irish nationalism from the social reality of the time and wrote in his paper *The Leader*: 'Even Mr. Yeats does not understand us, and he has yet to write even one line that will strike a chord of the Irish heart. He dreams dreams. They may be very beautiful and 'Celtic,' but they are not ours. The 'stately verse of the Protestant Primate of Ireland' - what interest has it for us?'<sup>20</sup>

This idea of Yeats's aloofness and irrelevance from the actual forces which brought about change in Ireland is what positions him, along with other writers and activists such as A.E. and James Stephens, in the words of Daniel Corkery as "to use the American phrase, the writers' who 'would not belong'".<sup>21</sup> In 'The Irish Writer' Thomas Kinsella sets out to compare Yeats and Joyce and finally concludes that Joyce, in spite of his apparent dislike for and renunciation of everything associated with Irish nationalism, had a 'direct and intimate' relationship to Ireland. Yeats, on the other hand, despite his preaching of national themes, was almost a kind of outsider, out of touch with the reality of the country he was living in:

He values what he can in Gaelic literature, and uses it, as we know; but his living tradition is solely in English ... Its literature and its human beings are specialized

and cut off, an Anglo-Irish annex to the history of Ireland. He yokes together Swift and Burke and Berkeley and Goldsmith for his writers ... It is English literature, nor Irish, that lies behind them and their line-as he sees it-is ending in his own time. ... He refuses to come to terms with the real shaping vitality of Ireland where he sees it exists.<sup>22</sup>

I think the reason for these contrasting views as to the role that Yeats played in the course of Irish nationalism goes back to the circularities, uncertainties, and even contradictions, which were manifested in his life and works. One significant point about the early Yeats and to a general extent the mature Yeats is that he was so promiscuous in his interests and preoccupations. He indulged simultaneously in multifarious enterprises ranging from occult magic and séances to cultural and nationalistic activities and involvements. Roy Foster, the most recent biographer of Yeats, notes that his 'life was lived on so many levels, in bursts of parallel intensity'.<sup>23</sup> Another influential biographer and scholar of the Irish poet, Richard Ellmann describes the young Yeats as giving us 'the impression of a man in a frenzy, beating on every door in the hotel in an attempt to find his own room'.<sup>24</sup> Even if he had found his room, one can imagine he would have never been happy to stay there. Quoting from Lady Gregory's diary, R.F. Foster tells us how at the peak of his public activities during the centenary celebrations of Wolfe Tone's 1798 unsuccessful uprising, Yeats may have surprised Augusta Gregory. When, discussing 1798, 'she remarked that if it had worked as intended (instead of turning into 'a massacre of protestants'), 'we shd all now be celebrating it'. WBY acutely contradicted her. 'He says he wd not, he wd be against the existing Govt then!''<sup>25</sup> The main complexity in the young Yeats is that although he was in one way or another engaged with nationalism and considered himself at times as a nationalist, he was somehow ambivalent, unsure, self-contradictory, and also hesitant about the implications of his nationalist activities. In other words, there were always ambiguities, complexities and contradictions in Yeats's version of nationalism. To make my point more clearly and to show some of these hidden tensions and ambivalences regarding Yeats's nationalism, I propose to look at some of his early works.

When we compare Yeats's early poetry with his prose, they seem to belong to two different worlds. Most of his early verse reflects a kind of escapist flight from the reality of life around him: his first collection of poems, *Crossways*, for example, is almost wholly situated in ancient Greece and India. A considerable part of his prose, on the other hand, provides a direct engagement with the everyday and current issues of his time. Comparing Yeats's early poetry and prose, John P. Frayne states the differences and distinguishes between the two: 'At the same time that his poetry of the eighties and nineties called for flight, escape, immunity from what he called in his "Into the Twilight" "the nets of wrong and right," his prose, calling for battle with the enemies of Ireland and the spirit, reflected his efforts to survive in a world from which he could not escape' (*UP* I, 19). Yeats himself offers the same view about the escapist nature of his early poetry. In his letters to his fellow artist Catherine Tynan in early 1888, around the time he was completing *The Wanderings of Oisín*, he cannot hide his dissatisfaction with the remoteness of his poetry: 'I have woven about me a web of thoughts. I wish to break through it, to see the world again' or 'I have noticed some things about my poetry I did not know before ... it is almost all a flight into fairyland from the real world, and a summons to that flight ... it is not the poetry of insight and knowledge, but of longing and complaint – the cry of the heart against necessity. I hope some day to alter that and write poetry of insight and knowledge' (*L*, 58 & 63). Years later in his *Autobiographies* he meditates on the remoteness of his early poems from the real world and their excessive preoccupation with the world of fairies and mythological characters: 'In my heart I thought that only beautiful things should be painted, and that only ancient things and the stuff of dreams were beautiful' (*Au*, 82). It is such remarks which make it difficult to read early poems such as 'The Song of the Happy Shepherd' and 'The Stolen Child' as Yeats's attempt 'to inspire the Irish people and to create a new nation'.<sup>26</sup>

There are, however, a number of Yeats's early poems which bear on his engagement with the issue of Irish nationalism and politics. In some of these poems the question of Irish nationalism and the speaker's attitude towards it is not the main theme. Rather, it is dealt with briefly and in a cursory way against a background of other concerns. For

example in 'The Lamentation of the Old Pensioner', where the main focus of the poem is old age and the changes it brings about in one's social position, there are references to the nationalist rebellions, 'Though lads are making pikes again / For some conspiracy, / And crazy rascals rage their fill / At human tyranny, / My contemplations are of Time / That has transfigured me' (VP, 131). Another instance is the opening poem of *In The Seven Woods*, which bears the same title. While the main background of the poem is the speaker's personal concerns of the time, namely his deep sorrow and frustration over Maud Gonne's marriage to Major John MacBride, there is also an expression of contempt and indignation towards the English crown and its new king, Edward VII:

I have heard the pigeons of the Seven Woods  
Make their faint thunder, and the garden bees  
Hum in the lime-tree flowers; and put away  
The unavailing outcries and the old bitterness  
That empty the heart. I have forgot awhile  
Tara uprooted, and new commonness  
Upon the throne and crying about the streets  
And hanging its paper flowers from post to post,  
Because it is alone of all things happy (VP, 198).

In some early poems nationalism and the poet's nationalist stance has a stronger presence; it is the main theme or one of the main themes of the poem. The most relevant examples are: 'To Ireland in the Coming Times' and 'Red Hanrahan's Song about Ireland'. From these I have chosen the first one as it is more pertinent to the issue I would like to discuss here, that is the conflicts, uncertainties, and dualities which were part and parcel of Yeats's interactions with Irish nationalism.

One of Yeats's main early poems, 'To Ireland in the Coming Times' has often been cited as an example of the young Yeats's nationalism. Denis Donoghue argues that in this poem Yeats tries to find a place for himself in the honourable list of the Protestant nationalists, while Eugene O'Brien suggests that it contains 'Perhaps the most overt Irish theme' in the volume of which it is the closing poem. Paul Scott Stanfield, in turn, points out that here Yeats aims to reconcile the three major passions of his youth, namely literature, nationalism, and philosophy into a meaningful whole.<sup>27</sup> 'To Ireland

in the *Coming Times*' therefore could be read as the young Yeats's attempt to establish and assert his position as a popular and nationalist poet. The title, the tone and the content of the poem, however, betray his deep concerns regarding the acceptance and the relevance of his particular kind of cultural nationalism in comparison with the more direct and popular nationalism of Irish poets such as Davis and Mangan, and also with the more militant and confrontational nationalism of Irish patriots such as Maud Gonne or D.P. Moran. Marjorie Howes, who has reviewed Yeats's nationalism in terms of gender and race, has read the tensions of the poem as arising from Yeats's 'assertion of his place in a masculine tradition of national literature against a series of anxious acknowledgments that his interest in the feminine, mystic Rose may preclude his inclusion in the nationalist brotherhood'.<sup>28</sup>

The very titles of the poem (both the original title 'Apologia Addressed to Ireland in the Coming Days' and the present one 'To Ireland in the Coming Times') suggest the poet's remoteness from the audience of his own time, and the defensive position he is caught in. He has to find an apology and to justify his use of esoteric subject matter in his poetry, which is considered irrelevant to or at least indirectly related to the question of Irish nationalism. Quite aware of the vulnerable position he was entangled in, the poet puts forward an 'Apologia', a justification for his poems, which is directed not at his contemporaries but to a future audience, 'To Ireland in the Coming Times'. Harold Orel notes 'the defensiveness implicit in the original title' of the poem and concludes that: 'Yeats, in seeking to immortalize Maud Gonne and to do so by exploiting the public and traditional meanings of the rose symbol, anticipated censure because his volume was not dedicated to the cause of nationalism'.<sup>29</sup> Aware of the vulnerable position he is entangled in, Yeats does not hesitate to refuse strongly the charge of those critics who accused him of the complexity of his symbolic language which made his poetry far-fetched and irrelevant to Irish political realities. He begins the poem by emphatically addressing his readers in an imperative mode: '*Know, that I would accounted be / True brother of a company / That sang, to sweeten Ireland's wrong, / Ballad and story, rann and song;*' (VP, 137). Pointing to Yeats's constant awareness of 'being something of an outsider', Patrick Kavanagh reads lines such as

*'Nor may I less be counted one / With Davis, Mangan, Ferguson,'* as an indication of Yeats's sense of not belonging to or rather as his aspiration to a place he does not possess: 'As Plato tells us in the person of Socrates a man cannot desire that which he has got. Joyce had it'; obviously Yeats did not, is Kavanagh's inevitable conclusion.<sup>30</sup> I think the central point here, more than whether Yeats was an Irish nationalist or not, which I believe he was in his own way, is the dualities inherent in his relationship with that nationalism. Here the poet declares his intention and aspiration to be rewarded a place in the pantheon of the great poets of the nation. In other words, he desires vehemently to be considered an Irish poet writing for the Irish people. He tries to secure his status right at the beginning; however, the very use of the emphatic and imperative mode could imply his doubt and internal tension regarding his position as a nationalist poet and the clarity and credibility of his poetry.

In the following lines of the stanza the speaker tries to justify the use in his poetry of the multi-dimensional image of rose: *'Nor be I any less of them, / Because the red-rose-bordered hem / Of her, whose history began / Before God made the angelic clan, / Trails all about the written page'* (VP, 137-38). Rose is a recurrent symbol in a number of the poems in this collection, poems such as 'To the Rose upon the Rood of Time', 'The Rose of the World', 'The Rose of Peace', and 'The Rose of Battle'. In these poems the rose possesses a host of different meanings and associations: it could refer, among other things, to spiritual love, supreme beauty, eternity, peace, war, poetic Muse, femininity, Maud Gonne, Helen of Troy, and Ireland.<sup>31</sup> Jeffares points out how by 1891 Yeats 'had begun to use the rose as an increasingly complex symbol. In doing so he was influenced by current English poetic practice and by the work of Irish poets in whose work it had stood for Ireland'.<sup>32</sup> Yeats's membership in Golden Dawn, in which rose was a central symbol, had also intensified his use of it in his poetry and in *The Secret Rose*, a collection of short stories published in 1897, which recount different mystical experiences. Yeats himself was aware that his poetry might become incomprehensible to the readers 'When I was writing 'The Rose', I found that I was becoming unintelligible to the young' (VP, 844). In fact in the opening poem of this collection 'To the Rose upon the Rood of Time', this fear is directly expressed. There

the poet feels that his involvement in occult activities and his remoteness from everyday life has made his poetry far-fetched to his readers:

*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;  
The weak worm hiding down in its small cave,  
The field-mouse running by me in the grass,  
And heavy mortal hopes that toil and pass;  
But seek alone to hear the strange things said  
By God to the bright hearts of those long dead,  
And learn to chaunt a tongue men do not know (VP, 101).*

In the explanatory notes to this poem, Yeats mentioned that ‘The Rose is a favourite symbol with the Irish poets. It has given a name to more than one poem, both Gaelic and English, and is used, not merely in love poems, but in addresses to Ireland, as in De Vere’s line, ‘The little black rose shall be red at last,’ and in Mangan’s ‘Dark Rosaleen.’ I do not, of course, use it in this last sense’ (VP, 798-99). Years later, of course, he will use it exactly in this last sense in a poem like ‘The Rose Tree’, which narrates a passionate conversation between the two martyrs of the Easter rising, Pearse and Connolly:

‘O words are lightly spoken,  
Said Pearse to Connolly,  
‘Maybe a breath of politic words  
Has withered our Rose Tree;  
Or maybe but a wind that blows  
Across the bitter sea.’  
.....  
‘But where can we draw water,’  
Said Pearse to Connolly,  
‘When all the wells are parched away?  
O plain as plain can be  
There’s nothing but our own red blood  
Can make a right Rose Tree.’ (VP, 396)

But unlike this poem, in *The Rose*, the symbolic rose could stand for a diversity of referents, nationalism being only one of them. The multiplicity of meanings and the different associations of the rose imagery in his early poems made Yeats susceptible to



an allegation brought about by the nationalists. By their standards, Yeats was not using this favourite symbol of nationalist poetic tradition, the rose, to solely glorify the cause of Ireland and Irish nationalism. This made it imperative for the young poet to defend his poetry against the charge of being vague and insufficiently nationalist.

The emphatic introductory note of the first stanza continues in the following one where the ambiguity, or rather the *diversity*, of Yeats's political loyalties is revealed in the list of the poets among whom he wishes to be included, '*Nor may I less be counted one / With Davis, Mangan, Ferguson*' (VP, 138). Both Thomas Davis and Clarence Managh were considered as nationalist poets. Davis was the most well-known poet of the Young Ireland movement who wrote moving ballads such as the famous *A Nation Once Again*, and Mangan was the author of *My Dark Rosaleen* and *A Vision of Connaught in the Thirteenth Century*, poems with a strong nationalist theme. Sir Samuel Ferguson, however, was politically a unionist and loyal to the British crown, and had an interest in Irish mythology and history. Yeats was quite aware that Sir Samuel Ferguson was not a nationalist poet in the sense that Davis and Mangan were, but to him, Ferguson was a nationalist and moreover 'the greatest Irish poet, because in his poems and the legends, they embody more completely than in any other man's writings, the Irish character' (UP I, 87). He praised Ferguson's poetry since in his poems and 'the legends they contain lies the refutation of the calumnies of England and those amongst us who are false to their country' (UP I, 104). Yeats's favourable view of the unionist Ferguson is an example that for him nationalism and unionism were not necessarily in conflict with each other. It also testifies to the ever-present opposite pulls and drives of loyalties in Yeats as a hybrid colonial subject. In the following lines of this stanza the speaker claims that his occult, visionary and mystic activities and interests have made his poetry somehow superior to his predecessors, '*Because to him who ponders well / My rhymes more than their rhyming tell / Of things discovered in the deep / Where only body's laid asleep / For the elemental creatures go / About my table to and fro*'. The stanza ends in an image of dancing fairies: '*Ah, faeries, dancing under the moon, / A Druid land, a Druid tune!*' (VP, 138-39) Even in a poem written to answer the critics who regarded his poetry as not

genuinely relevant to Irish nationalism because these poems were filled with otherworldly and imaginary subjects and images, Yeats cannot refrain from using the same subjects and images.

In the last stanza, the poet emphasizes that all his poetic accomplishments and whatever he writes is for his country: '*While still I may, I write for you / The love I lived, the dream I knew*' (VP, 139). He endeavours to prove his sincere and whole-hearted commitment to his country, so he declares, '*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*' (VP, 139). However, these final lines do not address a present audience; their appeal is to a future Ireland. This suggests that Yeats was not satisfied with or sure about the reception and the relevance of his artistic work by the audience of his own time. Ironically, one of the most nationalist poems of the early Yeats's turns into the poet's attempt to vigorously justify the relevance of his aesthetic poetry to the sceptic nationalists.

'To Ireland in the Coming Times' is not the only poem of *The Rose* where Yeats tries to justify the role of his poetry in the cause of Irish nationalism. He makes the same effort in 'The Dedication to a Book of Stories selected from the Irish Novelists'. The poem starts with a description of a time when 'Eire', an ancient name for Ireland, was a free country ruled by the Irish: '*There was a green branch hung with many a bell / When her own people ruled this tragic Eire; / And from its murmuring greenness, calm of Faery, / A Druid kindness, on all hearers fell*' (VP, 129). The very reference to a free Ireland ruled by the Irish implies that the present Ireland is not free and is controlled by foreigners. Yeats's notes on the 'green branch' with its 'many a bell' tell us that it refers to a 'legendary branch whose shaking cast all men into a gentle sleep'.<sup>33</sup> In the next lines of the poem the speaker addresses all the Irish exiles who are trying to ease Ireland's burden: '*Ah, Exiles wandering over lands and seas, / and planning, plotting always that some morrow / May set a stone upon ancestral Sorrow! / I also bear a bell-branch full of ease*' (VP, 129-30). Allying himself with the exiled nationalists, the poet claims that his poetry, in its own way, is also serving the national

cause. Like the legendary tree and its bells which gave those who heard it the comfort of a gentle sleep, the speaker's poetry has the power to comfort and to ease its audience. Then the poet stresses the Irishness of his poetry declaring that 'I tore it from green boughs winds tore and tossed / Until the sap of summer had grown weary! / I tore it from the barren boughs of Eire,' (*VP*, 130). His poetic inspiration or his poetry has its origins in the history of his country. Using the image of a tree and its boughs, the poet emphasizes the rootedness and the relatedness of his poetry, which like the branches of a tree have come and belong to the great tree of Ireland. In 1924 after revising this poem Yeats wrote: 'Even in its rewritten form it is a sheaf of wild oats' (*VP*, 129). This description fits well within the tree imagery of these lines. Among the revisions Yeats made were changing the final lines of the poem. In the present version they read as 'Gay bells or sad, they bring you memories / Of half-forgotten innocent old places: / We and our bitterness have left no traces / On Munster grass and Connemara skies' (*VP*, 130). In the first two lines, the speaker says that his poems, whether cheerful or melancholy record past memories of the readers. This implies closeness between him and his audience as he can write for them about common memories. While up to now the speaker had used 'I', in the third line of the final stanza the first plural pronoun 'we' is used. But who are 'we', and with whom is the speaker identifying himself? One possibility is that the speaker is aligning himself with those Irish poets who have written for and about their country. Another is that he ranks himself among those who have fought and are fighting to relieve the sorrows of their motherland, the 'Exiles' of line 9. Both interpretations are supported if we look at the original form of the final two lines which read: 'Cabins gone now, old well-sides, old dear places, / And men who loved the cause that never dies' (*VP*, 130). The old cause of nationalism is what the lovers of Ireland, her fighters and her poets have served, each in their own way, and the speaker of these lines considers himself to be one of them – that is, an Irish nationalist.

When we consider Yeats' prose, and by prose I mean his writings, correspondence, private utterances and public speeches, we find that tension, duality, uncertainty and change in Yeats's attitude toward Irish nationalism is more evident and expressed than

in his early poetry. Early on he could proclaim himself a nationalist: 'I am a Nationalist, and certain of my intimate friends have made Irish politics the business of their lives' (*Ex*, 116). But when the Irish Free State adopted an anti-Protestant constitution in 1937, Yeats did not hesitate to renounce his nationalism, writing: 'I am no Nationalist, except in Ireland for passing reasons' (*E & I*, 526). The years between these two opposite statements might somehow justify and account for their contrast. However, the sense of uneasiness with the strict ideology of nationalism was always present in Yeats. Even at the height of his nationalist endeavours, he shows his doubts and scepticism as to the nature of his involvement in those activities. For example at the same time that he was busy taking part in the preparatory meetings for the Wolfe Tone Centenary celebrations in 1898, making fiery speeches against the British Empire, he could not help revealing his internal tensions in a letter to Lady Gregory:

I have been chairman of a noisy meeting for three hours & am very done up. I have a speech to prepare for to night. Every thing went smoothly this morning in spite of anonymous letters warning us to keep a body guard at the door. Perhaps the disturbance waits for tonight. I find the infinite triviality of politics more trying than ever. We tare [sic] each others character in pieces for things that don't matter to anybody (*CL II*, 134-35).

After presiding over a national banquet at the Frascati Restaurant, Oxford Street, London where Lionel Johnson proposed the toast, 'Ireland a Nation', and other nationalists such as J.F. Taylor and Mark Ryan gave speeches, Yeats writes a letter, again to Lady Gregory: 'My dear Lady Gregory: I hope to get back to Coole early next week. I have had a rather troublesome time here' (*CL II*, 260). The tone of this letter suggests a kind of unease with Yeats's role as a national activist. It seems as if he cannot wait to get rid of the burden of his public commitments. It seems that this simply is not his world and he does not feel comfortable there. In another letter to Robert Bridges he could write that: 'I have been on an absurd crusade among absurd people and it will be a pleasure of the best to talk of poetry in the country' (*CL II*, 83).

Another example, which can shed more light on the shifting and uncertain attitudes of the young Yeats as a nationalist, is his reaction toward the question of the war that occurred between Britain and the autonomous South African republics in 1899. In

June of that year Britain had demanded voting rights for white non-Boer residents of the Orange Free State and Transvaal, but Paulus Kruger, the president of Transvaal refused and so the tension mounted. The inevitable war began in October 1899. Naturally according to the nationalist maxim that Britain's misfortune is Ireland's opportunity, most of the nationalist activists supported the Boers and their cause in the war against the British Empire. Nationalists such as John O'Leary, Michael Davitt, T.D. Sullivan, and Maud Gonne condemned and protested against Irish enlistment in the imperialistic war and expressed their solidarity for the Boers. In a letter to his sister Susan Mary Yeats on November 1899, Yeats writes about the Anglo-Boer war:

You must be much cheered by the war news to day. The spectacle of John Bull amassing 90 or 100 thousand men to fight 20 thousand & slapping his chest the while & calling on the heavens to witness his heroism has not been exhilarating. Ireland seems to be really excited & I am not at all sure that Maud Gonne may not be able to seriously check inlisting. She is working with extraordinary energy (*CL II*, 460).

Here we see the sarcastic tone of somebody who is poking fun at the empty greatness of the British colonial army. In his letters to Maud Gonne during this period he expresses his full sympathy for the 'just cause of the Boers': 'I need hardly say that I am with you and the meeting over which you will preside in wishing victory for the just cause of the Boers. I am not English, and owe England no loyalty; but if I were I would still think with Tolstoy that there is no loyalty that should make a man wish anything but victory to a just cause' (*CL II*, 477). However, in his letters to Lady Gregory he tries to make the impression that he does not approve of what Maud is doing, for instance when he writes 'Miss Gonne was full of her enlistment crusade' (*CL II*, 471). Using the same pejorative term 'crusade' which he had already used to disparage a nationalistic meeting during the Wolfe Tone Centenary preparations, he is implying his scorn for or indifference to her activities. In another letter to Lady Gregory he is more direct, expressing his distance and aloofness from what Maud is doing. He had hoped to go back to Coole, Lady Gregory's estate, and stay there for a while, but he goes on to mention the reason for his delay:

...unhappily a meeting of Miss Gonne keeps me over Sunday. I shall certainly however go by 9.15 train on Monday, & bring the clock with me. I am very much disappointed at having to stop for this meeting which is irrelevant for me but I can't get out of it. Maud Gonne told me not to wait for it but I could see that it was with but half a heart. The fact is that the meeting is about the Transval question & there are all kinds of intrigues going on which may leave her without speakers ... I am writing in her sitting room to see if I am wanted, for any purpose connected with this meeting (*CL II*, 454).

How can this difference in attitude toward the same question be explained? Is it only because Yeats is writing to two different persons who have opposite political views?

As a last example of the duality between his public and private utterances with regard to Irish nationalism we can refer to his article about Robert Emmet, the nationalist leader who led an unsuccessful rebellion against the colonial rule in 1803, and who was captured and consequently executed by the British. In 'Emmet: The Apostle of Irish Liberty', Yeats praised Emmet for his sacrifice and bravery to face the might of the British Empire:

Just when it seemed that they had bribed all that mattered in Ireland, this young man came and he laid down his life. He showed that there was something in Ireland which not all the wealth of the world would purchase. He seemed to say to England: How can you permanently triumph? What can you offer to us if we do not fear to leave even life itself?' (*CW X*, 101)

In a letter addressed to Lady Gregory, a few days before the publication of his Emmet article in *The Gaelic American*, he wrote:

I am dreadfully busy over my Emmet lecture, which is a frightful nuisance. It is indeed, as you say, a sword dance and I must give to it every moment. I had no idea until I started on it how completely I have thought myself out of the whole stream of traditional Irish feeling on such subjects. I am just as strenuous a Nationalist as ever, but I have got to express these things all differently (*L*, 432).

The question here could be, as Deirdre Toomey asks, do public speeches or the personal letters, or as the case of the Boer war displays, certain sets of personal letters, reflect the real Yeats. Toomey's answer tries to justify the difference in Yeats's

attitudes. Taking side with the public utterances, she tries to explain away the personal letters by focusing on their addressees.<sup>34</sup> Both Lady Gregory and the English poet Robert Bridges were unsympathetic to Yeats's political activities and naturally enough, Toomey implies, Yeats avoided embarrassing them and himself. Yet the more important point here is that the contrast between the public utterances and the private correspondence and also the contrast between private letters to different addressees is still there, and it points to an ambivalence and tension in Yeats's nationalist commitments and activities. The question here, it should be once more emphasized, is not whether Yeats was a nationalist or a unionist, or in a broader sense an anti-colonial poet or a poet with colonialist inclinations; rather the more significant point is the very existence of diverse, uncertain and shifting attitudes in his thought and works which should preclude us from labelling him using either one of the above epithets. In other words we might never know whether the public or the private utterances reflect Yeats's sincere thoughts and feelings towards his nationalist activities. The disparity between the two stances points to the unproductivity of an either/or approach to the Irish poet.

According to Yeats's authorized biographer R.F. Foster: 'He came to fame as the poet of the new Ireland, asserting its identity; his own discovery of his voice neatly paralleled with his country's discovery of independence. But he was also a product of *ancien régime*: Victorian, Protestant, Ascendancy Ireland'.<sup>35</sup> The hybrid nature of his mixed background resulted in a kind of complicated, conflicted and divided identity, which Yeats lived with throughout most of his life. The problem with the Anglo-Irish writers such as Synge and Yeats was that they were neither completely English, nor completely Irish. As G. J. Watson has argued in *Irish Identity and the Literary Revival: Synge, Yeats, Joyce and O'Casey*, these writers who came from the mixed background of the Anglo-Irish 'felt themselves isolated, even aliens, in their own land'.<sup>36</sup> This sense of not quite belonging to either side of the colonial divide, or rather a sense of having different allegiances, could best account for the contradictions and tensions in his attitude towards the question of Irish nationalism. In his *Autobiographies* he tells us how as a young man he could criticise harshly both the

Catholics and the Protestants for their defects: 'I had noticed that Irish Catholics among whom had been born so many political martyrs had not the good taste, the household courtesy and decency of the Protestant Ireland I had known; yet Protestant Ireland seemed to think of nothing but getting on in the world' (*AU*, 101-02). When he thinks about the nationalist Ireland of his early career, he cannot hide his anger at the blind and dogmatic outlooks of the nationalists, which led them to disagree about everything. His bitter recollection of 'Nationalist Dublin' as a city where 'there was not – indeed there still is not – any society where a man is heard by the right ears, but never overheard by the wrong, and where he speaks his whole mind gaily, and is not the cautious husband of a part; where fantasy can play before matured into conviction; where life can shine and ring, and lack utility' suggests his disappointment with the restricting and opinionated nationalism of the times surrounding his youth (*AU*, 230-31). Later on he becomes more direct and critical and brings under question all the vehement and enthusiastic sentiments of his early patriotism:

When I look back upon my Irish propaganda of those years I can see little but its bitterness. I never met with, or but met to quarrel with, my father's old family acquaintance; or with acquaintance I myself might have found, and kept among the prosperous educated class, who had all the great appointments at University or Castle; and this I did by deliberate calculation. If I must attack so much that seemed sacred to Irish Nationalist opinion, I must, I knew, see to it that no man suspect me of doing it to flatter Unionist opinion ... I chose Royal visits especially for demonstration of disloyalty, rolling up with my own hands the red carpet spread by some elderly Nationalist, softened or weakened by time, to welcome Viceroyalty; and threatening, if our London society drank to the King's health, that my friends and I would demonstrate against it by turning our glasses upside-down... (*AU*, 233)

Here he is trying to blame the cultural context for some of his radical actions, thus denying his own agency, perhaps to assuage a sense of guilt, and at the same time he is revealing the extent to which he felt potentially compromised by his own cultural and religious backgrounds. Obviously he has come a long way from the days he made fiery speeches, took part in organizing demonstrations and political activities, and had fixed ideas and beliefs about nationalism. Now he can make the confession that those who were supporting colonialism and those who were fighting it were similar in many respects:



Popular Nationalism and Unionism so changed into one another, being each but the other's headache. The Nationalist abstractions were like the fixed ideas of some hysterical women, a part of the mind turned into stone, the rest a seething and burning; and Unionist Ireland had reacted from that seething and burning to a cynical indifference, and from those fixed ideas to whatever might bring the most easy and obvious success (AU, 234).

Yeats's *Autobiographies* is the brainchild of the mature poet disillusioned by the hostility of the Catholic Irish middle class and the lack of support from the protestant minority to his theatre movement and whatever he regarded as possessing artistic value. His criticism and equation of the two opposing sides of the colonial conflict and his sense of belonging to neither of them thus seems the natural and inevitable consequence of his bitter experiences. However even at the last decade of the nineteenth century when he was still actively engaged in Irish nationalism, he could blame both nationalists and unionists for the narrowness of their outlooks:

Before 1891, Unionists and Nationalists were too busy keeping one or two simple beliefs at their fullest intensity for any complexity of thought or emotion; and the national imagination uttered itself, with a somewhat broken energy, in a few stories and in many ballads about the need of unity against England, about the martyrs who had died at the hand of England, or about the greatness of Ireland before the coming of England (UP II, 184).

Here the popular and common melodramatization of Ireland's past wrongs is brought under severe scrutiny. No longer is Ireland viewed as the fair heroine and England as the dark villain. The equation of the two traditionally opposing sides of the colonial divide is a step toward the negation of the fixed duality underlying the approaches that consider colonial identities as distinct and opposite. This ironic and criticizing tone, which questions the orthodox views the young Yeats held just a few years earlier, is a challenge to any criticism which presupposes a fixed colonial identity for him. If here he is finding faults with both the nationalists and the unionists for what they supposedly have been doing before 1891, he himself could propagate the black and white imagery of England the oppressor versus Ireland the oppressed as late as 1892 in his nationalist articles. He could describe himself to the readers of *The Boston Pilot* as 'Your Celt' writing 'from the capitol of the enemy', an enemy who 'is not sympathetic

or self-abnegating' and who 'has conquered the world by quite different powers' (*LNI*, 153 & 190). In these articles Yeats subscribes exactly to the same orthodox views of the nationalists (and the unionists) he is now criticising. The development in Yeats's attitude towards the question of nationalism supports the view that change, multiplicity, contradiction, and complexity should be foregrounded as the criteria of the colonial encounter.

## **COLONIAL STEREOTYPES**

Another area where Yeats's complex and shifting attitudes preclude us from assenting to the two clear-cut, fixed, and static colonial or anti-colonial opposite views of him is his treatment of colonial stereotypes. On the one hand the young Yeats acted as a nationalist whose main aim was to challenge the colonialist stereotyping of the Irish by praising those seemingly negative characteristics of his race as virtues. On the other hand in order to valorise the Irish, almost unknowingly, he supported and propagated some of those very stereotypic attributes. Moreover he himself was trapped in the comparative valuation system of colonial discourse when he used fixed stereotypes for the English. It was only during the later years of his career that he could get rid himself of the whole repetitive system of stereotyping and look back critically on his past.

In his pioneering book, *Orientalism*, Edward Said claims that Orientalism has been a dominant and influential Western approach for shaping, creating, and controlling the Orient. Orientalism, according to Said has been successful since it always 'puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand'.<sup>37</sup> In a rather crude account of colonialism, an important and effective strategy to support the supremacy of the colonizer and to subdue the colonized, the creation and circulation of stereotypes, has always been part and parcel of colonial discourse. The unique and personal characteristics of the individuals are ignored and they are seen as a whole, as types. Thus the colonizing force is presented as benevolent, rational, and progressive; its only purpose is to

improve the personality and life of the ignorant, emotional, and backward people in the colonized countries. In order to justify colonial rule the colonized are pictured as savages and barbarians, incapable of governing themselves and therefore in need of being ruled over by the wise and patronizing colonizers. In 'Stereotype, discrimination and the discourse of colonialism', Homi Bhabha argues that 'The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction'.<sup>38</sup> These negative and positive polarizations of the two sides of the colonial encounter are repeatedly invented and propagated in different ways so that their reality becomes a matter of fact, hard to refute and even accepted by the colonized.

On the opposite side, those who try to resist colonialism, particularly the anti-colonialist intellectuals, react against this kind of bigoted representation by simply reversing the whole system of comparison. For example, in the Negritude movement the black people and the very fact of blackness, which in the value system of the colonizing imperial centre was viewed as a defect and ugliness, a symbol of sin, laziness, and degeneration, is celebrated as a positive characteristic and is consequently highly praised and valued. The same process happens in the nationalist movements: that is, inverting the demeaning characteristics attributed to the colonized by the colonizer, to justify the colonial rule, into laudatory traits to encourage and promote the anticolonial struggle. What Amílcar Cabral denounces as the 'indiscriminate compliments, systematic exaltations of virtues without condemning faults, blind acceptance of the values of culture, without considering precisely what presently or potentially regressive elements it contains' happens here.<sup>39</sup> In their enthusiastic zeal to confront the humiliating discourse of colonialism, the nationalists, by simply reversing the colonial stereotypes, get caught up in the same monolithic valuation system that leaves no space for variety and hybridity. That is one of the reasons why some critics have regarded nationalism as the counterpart of the colonialism it sets out to topple, in the words of Seamus Deane: 'Nationalism, cultural or political, is no more than an inverted image of the colonialism it seeks to replace'.<sup>40</sup>

In the case of Ireland, like other colonized nations such as India or African countries, a great part of British colonial discourse continued to malign the Irish people by inventing hostile, savage, and uncivilized images of them. A considerable body of historical studies maintains that British colonial discourse stereotyped and vilified the Irish. Robert James Scally believes that Victorian England looked down on Irish people as ‘a paradigm of the barbarian’; for them ‘Paddy’, the pejorative term for the Irish, ‘stood beside the Fedayeen or Aborigene, just above the apes on the ‘monkey chart’’.<sup>41</sup> L. Perry Curtis, Jr. has noted how the stereotypical presentation of the colonized Irish developed in nineteenth-century England. Thus, while in the mid-century the Irish were portrayed as comic and foolish figures, the end of century caricatures tended to depict them as dangerous and uncontrollable sub-humans.<sup>42</sup> These stereotypes and misrepresentations of the Irish continued throughout the nineteenth century in English media and literature. Alasdair Macrae mentions some insulting and shocking examples of the portrayal of the Irish as ‘apes or animals’ by cartoonists of the time such as John Tenniel.<sup>43</sup> So from the view point of Imperialist England the Irish were looked down not only as an inferior race but also as non-humans. They were equated with women, children, and lunatics because they were dreamy, extravagant, emotional and irrational. The colonized people were identified with ‘the infantile state of man’. As Declan Kiberd points out:

All through the nineteenth century the Irish had been treated in the English media as childlike - ‘broths of boys’ veering between smiles and tears, quick to anger and quick to forget – unlike the stable Anglo-Saxon. In the words of historian Perry Curtis: “Irishmen thus shared with virtually all the non-white peoples of the empire the label childish, and the remedy for unruly children in most Victorian household was a proper licking”.<sup>44</sup>

In the worldwide household of the British empire the political implication and the inevitable conclusion of this biased and humiliating representation worked against the Irish people’s striving for self-government; as Matthew Arnold, who was a pioneering and important figure in stereotyping the Celts, blatantly put it, the Irish could be ‘a nation poetically only, not politically’.<sup>45</sup>

The young Yeats obviously felt it his duty as a nationalist artist to fight against and to explode colonial stereotypes of the Irish in various articles, reviews, and letters, which he wrote during the 1890s. Along with other Celtic Revivalists such as Augusta Gregory, Douglas Hyde, and John Milton Synge, he set out to confront the colonial denigration of the Irish at the hands of their oppressors. In Lady Gregory's terms they wanted to show that 'Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of an ancient idealism'.<sup>46</sup> Gregory Castle has noted how in most of his writings which discussed Irish folklore and national literature, some of them based on the material collected by Lady Gregory, 'Yeats's ongoing project of resistance to colonialist and anthropological stereotypes of the peasantry' was quite obvious.<sup>47</sup>

In 'Popular Ballad Poetry of Ireland', written in 1889, Yeats reviews Irish ballad poets. He praises such poets as Andrew Macgrath, O'Sullivan the Red, and John MacConnell for their love of Ireland and the way they depicted her in their popular ballads. The poor, Yeats tells us, loved these poets and their poetry while the rich hated them because of their political poetry. These poets 'disguised their meaning in metaphor and symbol. The poet goes out in the morning and meets a beautiful spirit weeping and lamenting ... On her he lavishes all his power of description, and then calls her Ireland. Or else he evades the law by hiding his sedition under the guise of a love-song' (*UP* I, 150). This article was first written for publication in *Leisure Hour*, an English journal of late nineteenth century. For the English audience at that time, the most well-known Irish book was Thomas Moore's *Irish Melodies*. According to John P. Fryane, 'Moore stood for the convivial Ireland of the tear and the smile, a manageable, Unionist Ireland that need not be taken seriously' (*UP* I, 36). Yeats, however, excludes Moore, alongside with Charles James Lever and Samuel Lover, from his article because to him:

They were never poets of the people. Moore lived in the drawing-rooms, and still finds his audience therein. Lever and Lover, kept apart by opinion from the body of the nation, wrote ever with an eye on London. They never wrote for the

people, and neither have they ever, therefore, in prose or verse, written faithfully of the people. Ireland was a metaphor to Moore, to Lever and Lover a merry harlequin, sometimes even pathetic, to be patted and pitted and laughed at so long as he said “your honour,” and presumed in nowise to be considered a serious or tragic person (*UP I*, 161-62).

In another article on the poetry of Sir Samuel Ferguson, which was published in the *Dublin University Review* in 1886, Yeats lauds Ferguson’s poems because like his own project they are a rejection of the denigratory stereotypes of Irishmen. They contain ‘the refutation of the calumnies of England and those amongst us who are false to their country. We are often told that we are men of infirm will and lavish lips, planning one thing and doing another, seeking this to-day and that tomorrow’. They also celebrate the Celt’s intensity of passions: ‘But a widely different story these legends tell. The mind of the Celts loves to linger on images of persistence; implacable hate, implacable love’ (*UP I*, 104).

During the years 1888 to 1892 Yeats wrote regularly for the two nationalist periodicals: *Boston Pilot* and the *Providence Sunday Journal*. In some of these articles Yeats, who is enraged by the biased stereotypical representations of the Irish, tries to refuse them. For instance in a review of Stevenson’s *Master of Ballantrae*, he objects to the characterization of the Chevalier Burke whom Stevenson portrays as a typical Irishman. He admits that ‘One sometimes meets even at this day vulgar, plausible, swaggering “Irishmen,” who are its much decayed survivals, and who give Mr. Stevenson his justification’. But Yeats blames the English for bringing about such offensive characters: ‘They are bad, but none of our making; English settlers bore them, English laws moulded them’. Finally, rejecting Stevenson’s demeaning characterization of the Irish peasants, he concludes that:

No one who knows the serious, reserved and suspicious Irish peasant ever held them in any way representative of the national type. It is clear that Mr. Stevenson has no first hand knowledge of Ireland, and when a member of the English garrison, private or subaltern, comes to England and chooses to masquerade as a genuine Irishman, he too often, through some perversion of moral judgment, affects to be some such Irishman as this rogue and charlatan and mountebank “gentleman,” Chevalier Burke (*LNI*, 90-1).

By emphasizing Stevenson's lack of awareness regarding the Irish, Yeats is suggesting his own closeness to and knowledge of the people. Moreover, in a quite explicit nationalist agenda he is trying to explode colonial stereotypes of his countrymen. In another article he laments the non-nationality of Allingham, which according to Yeats is the inevitable and unfortunate outcome of Allingham's view of the Irish: 'The people of Ireland seem to Mr. Allingham graceful, witty, picturesque, benevolent, everything but a people to be taken seriously' (*LNI*, 172).

In all these writings the young nationalist poet tries to discard the demeaning and belittling view of the Irish as a backward colonized nation by reversing colonialist stereotypes. Here Yeats fits well into the role of the nationalist colonized artist who arrives at the outright turning-down of the colonialist scheme of identity formation by counter-reading negative stereotype-ridden depictions of the Irish in two ways: through rejecting the conventional picture of his fellow countrymen and through over-valuing them. But vehement and enthusiastic as he was in fighting against the colonial stereotyping of his countrymen, the young Yeats was somehow departing from, relying on, and propagating some of the same colonialist stereotyping he was trying to undermine. As a number of critics have pointed out, even at the time that he was writing fervently against the degrading colonial clichés of the Irish, Yeats was circulating the same clichés, and even acting them out in his personal life. In *Yeats: The Irish Literary Revival and the Politics of Print*, Yug Mohit Chaudhry argues that the young Yeats was in his own work conforming to the expected stereotypical view of the Irish as imaginative, dreamy and childlike people. Chaudhry points out the reasons why the unionist and the anti-Irish editor of *Scots* and *National Observer*, W.E. Henley, supported and edited the young nationalist Yeats. According to Chaudhry, one reason was that:

Though Yeats did not quite play Paudeen, he certainly donned the grab of the stereotypical Celt revolting against the despotism of fact. ... Evidently, Henley was quite prepared to brook Irish hostility so long as it was restricted to 'sprites and goblins'. And perhaps he was equally prepared to publish Yeats so long as he portrayed the Irishman's supposed impracticality and his dreamy, fanciful,

childlike nature. These characteristics were perfect foils to the Saxon's hard grasp on fact and a justification for the genetic and other improvements English rule would gradually effect in Ireland. They reiterated, in milder language and with only the slightest of blurring around the edges, Henley's contrast between the manly Saxon conqueror and the childlike Irish native. Moreover, by bypassing the freedom struggle in Ireland, such writing could convey the impression that the nationalists were not typical of the country as a whole and were merely a fanatical fringe.<sup>48</sup>

Regarding his writings for Henley's journals, Yeats later noted that to 'avoid unacceptable opinions, I wrote nothing but ghost or faery stories, picked up from my mother or some pilot at Rosses Point, and Henley saw that I must needs [sic] mix a palette fitted to my subject-matter' (*Au*, 129). However, it was not only in his writing for Henley's periodicals that Yeats portrayed a dreamy and superstitious picture of the Irish, some of his reviews of Irish poets and much of his writings in *The Celtic Twilight* were written in the same vein. Yeats begins his *The Celtic Twilight* with these introductory words: 'I have desired, like every artist, to create a little world out of the beautiful, pleasant, and significant things of this marred and clumsy world, and to show in a vision something of the face of Ireland to any of my own people who would look where I bid them' (*CT*, 1). This is not a world of actualities, and there is no need for the English colonizer to be afraid of this Ireland, where people are happy with their own imaginary and beautiful world and their belief in 'dhouls and faeries' (*CT*, 1). In 'The Poetry of R.D. Joyce', Yeats celebrates in Joyce's poetry what he considers as 'characteristic of the Celtic race, ever desiring the things that lie beyond the actual; dreamy and fanciful things, unreal if you will, as are all the belonging of the spirit from the point of view of the body, that loves to cry "dreamer, dreamer," to its hard task-master the spirit' (*UP I*, 108). This is hardly a depiction of the colonized Irishman who can fight his colonizers. On the contrary, this is a picture that subscribes to the English colonizer's view that the colonized Irish are mere dreamers who cannot govern their own country and so need to be ruled by others.

In both these examples Yeats's depiction of the Irish peasant as living in a world of imagination ignores the harsh realities of everyday life. Edward Hirsch has commented that 'By mystifying an ancient, unchanging folk life, removed from the harsh realities



of land agitation and social conflict in the countryside' Yeats is treating 'the peasant as a romantic emblem of a deep, cultural, pastoral, and significantly anticommercial (or nonmaterialistic) Irish life'.<sup>49</sup> Therefore his treatment of the question of colonial stereotypes could be seen both as a sign of his anticolonialism, and as a rather tacit and unconscious collaboration with colonial thinking. We are tempted to agree with Yeats's biographer R.F. Foster when he holds that 'though jeering at Mathew Arnold,' Yeats 'still apparently subscribed to the Arnoldean view of the Celt as dreamy, sensitive, and doom-laden'.<sup>50</sup> Marjorie Howes expresses a similar view when she asserts that Yeats was complicit in his Celtic writings with the imperial rendering of the Celts. According to Howes, both his early depiction of the Celts as having feminine qualities and his later turn to peasantry as the representative of the Celtic race subscribed to the colonial stereotypes of the Irish as feminine, primitive, and by implication weak, uncivilized, and incapable of self-government.<sup>51</sup>

Another example of Yeats's mixed and ambiguous engagement with the issue of colonial stereotyping is what he proposes to do in 'The Celtic Element in Literature'. Departing from Ernest Renan's and Arnold's view of the Celts, he declares that his project is to 're-state them a little, and see where they are helpful and where they are hurtful' (*E & I*, 174). He then goes on to praise the Celts for their imagination, sensuality, dreaminess, and passionate temperaments, discovering a similarity between Irish folklore and that of the world and praising it: 'It has again and again brought 'the vivifying spirit' 'of excess' into the arts of Europe' (*E & I*, 185). Here the poet is adopting a strategy which employs similar terms to those developed by colonialist thinkers such as Matthew Arnold, only this time in order to valorize them. He seemingly uses the language of the oppressors to find a place for the oppressed by not surrendering to the imposed clichés of the hegemonic discourse of colonialism. However the case is more complicated than it seems at first. By using the same terminology of writers such as Arnold and Renan Yeats implicitly accepts their depiction of the Irish as imaginative, sensual and dreamy people, and thus subscribes to the very stereotypes created by the colonizer. In other words, by idealizing those aspects of Irish culture and those apparently essential qualities of the Irish race that

imperial discourse had used to mark the former colony as the *other* he remains trapped in the empire's black and white discourse. Commenting on the relation between a writer and his people, Rajeev S. Patke notes that: 'For Yeats, this relation was mediated through-not just ideas, but-idealizations. He worked within the Celtic stereotype established by Renan and consolidated by Arnold's characterization of 'the impressionable Celt' 'full of fanfaronade''. Patke then compares Yeats's subscription to these stereotypical images of the Irish with 'the self-image of the colonized Indian' portrayed by Pritish Nandy, a contemporary Indian socialist:

Colonialism replaced the normal ethnocentric stereotype of the inscrutable Oriental by the pathological stereotype of the strange, primal but predictable Oriental-religious but superstitious, clever but devious, chaotically violent but effeminately cowardly. Simultaneously, colonialism created a domain of discourse where the standard mode of transgressing such stereotypes was to reverse them: superstitious but spiritual, uneducated but wise, womanly but pacific, and so on.<sup>52</sup>

In his attitude towards the question of the material poverty of the colonized the young Yeats seems to have more in common with colonial rather than with anti-colonial thinking. Anti-colonial thinkers have stressed the link between the degrading effects of material poverty, which they regard as the direct outcome of colonialism, and the spiritual corruption of the colonized. Franz Fanon articulates the same idea in his *The Wretched of the Earth* when he writes: 'The poverty of the people, national oppression, and the inhibition of culture are one and the same thing'.<sup>53</sup> The young Yeats, however, seems to sentimentalize material poverty and failure. The idealization of poverty was part and parcel of the Celticist discourse in which the young Yeats was involved during the last decade of the nineteenth century. He does not look upon material poverty as a shortcoming or as some problem which should be removed; rather he considers it as a sign of spiritual success and moral superiority of which the Irish should be proud. For Yeats, the Irish peasant is rich in imagination and in character exactly because of his physical poverty and social failure. He does not hesitate to claim that: 'the spiritual history of the world has been the history of conquered races' (*UP II*, 70). The belief that Ireland's rich cultural heritage is because of her having undergone material defeat and oppression seem to be somehow

justifying the status quo, that is, the present relation between the Irish and their conquerors. At least the colonized could find solace in his spiritual superiority over his colonizers, taking resort in his beautiful imaginative world: 'this strange Gaelic race lives between two worlds, the world of its poverty, and a world of wild memories and of melancholy, beautiful imaginations' (*UP I*, 396).

This contrast between the coarseness of the real world and the idealistic world of imagination is the theme of a number of early poems such as 'The Song of the Happy Shepherd', 'The Sad Shepherd', and 'The Stolen Child'. This is a typical characteristic of Yeats's poetry in the eighties, a call to the fairy world of imagination, a call to dream and not to action. In 'The Stolen Child', for example, the imaginary world of the fairies is drawn by tempting descriptions which lures the human child who is tempted to escape from the pains of everyday life into the sweetness of fairyland:

Where dips the rocky highland  
Of Sleuth Wood in the lake,  
There lies a leafy island  
Where flapping herons wake  
The drowsy water-rats;  
There we've hid our faery vats,  
Full of berries  
And of reddest stolen cherries.  
*Come away, O human child!*  
*To the waters and the wild*  
*With a faery, hand in hand,*  
*For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand* (*VP*, 86-7).

Likewise in 'The Song of the Happy Shepherd' the speaker calls on the 'sick children of the world' to dream and to believe that not 'dusty deeds' but 'words alone are certain good'. This call to dream and escape from the real world is once more repeated at the final line of the poem: 'Dream, dream, for this is also sooth' (*VP*, 65, 67).

If these poems belong to a period when Yeats was still writing the poetry of 'longing and complaint', the same trend of infantilizing the Irish can be traced in the 'poetry of insight and knowledge' of the later period. One instance is Yeats's

controversial play, *The Countess Cathleen*. The context of the play was a political one: the Great Famine of 1848. Moreover, in its idealization of Maud Gonne, the revolutionary Irish nationalist, the political theme of the play becomes more evident. Yeats's most recent biographer, R.F. Foster, stresses the political context and message of the play: 'Though WBY would eventually classify it as an anti-politics play, his demon soul-merchants must, to a contemporary audience, have looked like Protestant proselytizers or English oppressors; and Famine Ireland was, to any reader of John Mitchel, an inescapably political *mise-en-scène*'.<sup>54</sup> Foster is not the only critic who points out the political background of the play. Drawing on Irish folklore, Jeffares tells us that Yeats wrote the play partly to impress Maud Gonne and to convince her of his ability to play an active role in the movement for the Irish independence but 'he also wrote the play as a warning to her that she was in danger of losing her own soul through this immersion in political activity'.<sup>55</sup> In Yeats own words: 'I told [Maud Gonne] after meeting her in London I had come to understand the tale of a woman selling her soul to buy food for a starving people as a symbol of all souls who lose their peace, or their fairness, or any beauty of the spirit in political service, but chiefly of her soul that had seemed so incapable of rest' (*Mem*, 47).

The play was dedicated to Maud Gonne who like its female protagonist was campaigning to feed the hungry people of Western Ireland during a local famine. She nevertheless refused to play the part of Countess as she did not consider the play to be sufficiently nationalistic. Yeats's dual motives for writing the play once again indicate his internal doubts and reservations about involvement in nationalist activities. He is torn between adoration and criticism. On the one hand he tends to admire the Countess for helping the Irish poor during the Great Famine, but on the other hand he wants to warn Gonne from doing the same thing at present, seeing it as an unacceptable immersion in political activities. Elizabeth Cullingford expresses the same view when she writes: 'Yeats told Maud Gonne that the play was a symbol of all souls who lose their fineness and peace in political service (a statement which suggests disapproval), but the text itself triumphantly justifies the action of Cathleen in selling her soul. Political service is vindicated: the peasants are saved and the Countess is not

damned'.<sup>56</sup> Years later the same dual attitude is expressed in his famous poem 'The Circus Animals' Desertion': '*The Countess Cathleen* was the name I gave it; / She, pity-crazed, had given her soul away, / But masterful Heaven had intervened to save it. / I thought my dear must her own soul destroy, / So did fanaticism and hate enslave it,' (VP, 629-30). While the Countess's action is regarded approvingly by the poet, his disapproval of the waste of *Gonne's* beauty and energy in politics is quite clear in these lines.

The play is set in Famine-stricken Ireland, where two demonic merchants who represent materialistic England are sent by Satan to buy the souls of the starving people in return for gold. The saintly aristocratic Cathleen disposes of her vast estates and wealth in order to feed the peasants, yet the demons thwart her at every turn; at last, she sacrifices her own soul to save those of the poor, and finally she herself is saved because 'The Light of Lights / Looks always on the motive, not the deed' of his creatures (VPL, 167). The main theme of the play is self-sacrifice in the service of the national cause, but the important point here is that it is not the peasants, the actual sufferers of the poverty but the aristocratic Countess Cathleen who sacrifices herself for the national cause to save her people. The peasants are portrayed either as devout and simple-minded followers like Mary or timid, greedy and ignorant like Shemus and his son. When Aleel, the musician-poet, begins to play for Cathleen to relieve her, the starving Shemus starts to grumble, but after Cathleen tells him not to blame Aleel as 'The doctors bid me fly the unlucky times / And find destruction for my thoughts, or else / Pine to my grave', Shemus is quick to timidly justify himself: 'I have said nothing, lady / Why should the like of us complain?' (VPL, 21-3) According to G.J. Watson, *The Countess Cathleen* is permeated with the self-serving doctrine of the Ascendancy while poor peasants are portrayed as double-faced, 'cringing and servile'.<sup>57</sup> The theme of aristocratic patronage resonates throughout the play. Thus, Mary the devout peasant woman who refuses to sell her soul to the devil acquiescently confesses to the Countess: 'my old fathers served your fathers, lady, / Longer than books can tell' (VPL, 19). Throughout the play the peasants are described as weak and dependent creatures who cannot help themselves; they need somebody to save them,

exactly like children who need to be protected by their mother in a time of distress. Even their souls are of less worth than the aristocrat Cathleen, the beneficent land owner who sacrifices her noble soul for the sake of the unprincipled peasants. While the demonic merchants refuse to pay more than one to two hundred for the souls of peasants, they actually buy the Countess's soul for five hundred thousand crowns. Even in a supposedly nationalist play with the political context of the 1848 Great Famine, Yeats propagates the idea of the peasants' dependence, inferiority and servility, and so stereotypes them as loyal and subservient servants to their masters and landlords. In other words, he is to some extent confirming the pejorative English stereotypes of the Irish.

Moreover, the young Yeats had his own stereotypes of the English. In fact, like almost all Irish children he grew up surrounded by anti-English stereotypes. Thus in later years the middle-aged poet could remember rather amusingly and ironically how as a child he 'did not think English people intelligent or well-behaved unless they were artists,' how everybody in Sligo 'disliked England with a prejudice that had come down perhaps from the days of the Irish Parliament,' and finally how he 'knew stories to the discredit of England, and took them all seriously' (*Au*, 33-4). Later on he quotes a young Irish horse-trainer telling him stories about the sexual unscrupulousness of the two English lords who "always exchanged wives when they went to the Continent for a holiday". The young jockey himself had been tempted to go 'home with a woman, but having touched his scapular by chance, saw in a moment an angel waving white wings in the air.' The ending of this childish memory written by the grown-up Yeats is the most interesting part of the story: the young Yeats meets the jockey no more and his uncle tells him that 'he had done something disgraceful about a horse' (*Au*, 75). Jahan Ramazani, who has mentioned these quotations from Yeats's *Autobiography* in his illuminating essay, 'Is Yeats a Postcolonial Poet?' notes that: 'In a familiar subaltern strategy, these stories and images turn the tables on English stereotypes of the Irish. It is not the Irish but the English who speak strangely, eat barbaric food, and fail to restrain sexual appetite'. He then continues that 'Anticipating a critique of anticolonial nationalism, from Fanon to Seamus Deane, Yeats worries that anti-

English prejudices invert but ultimately preserve the colonizer's terms. But Yeats's dialectical suspicion of such cultural biases, instead of excluding him from consideration as a postcolonial writer, makes him typical'.<sup>58</sup> I agree with Ramazani and his conclusion, but what Ramazani calls 'Yeats's dialectical suspicion of such cultural biases' belongs to the middle-aged Yeats, around 1916, when he finished writing 'Reveries over Childhood and Youth', a part of Yeats's *Autobiography* from which the above-mentioned stories about anti-English prejudices derive.

However, in his youth the Irish poet's stance was far from suspecting the cultural biases of the Irish in depicting their oppressors. In fact he was to some extent propagating stereotypical representations of the English: 'The Saxon is not sympathetic or self-abnegating ... He is full of self-brooding ... He is always a lens colored by self' (*LNI*, 190). During the 1890s, along with other cultural nationalists, Yeats was involved in an active way to define Ireland as fundamentally opposed to Anglo-Saxon values and English identity. In other words, he was trying to create a consciousness of national difference between Ireland and England. His cultural nationalist attitude during the last decade of the nineteenth century involved a determined embrace of Irish identity as having certain essential qualities in sharp contrast to its imperial neighbor. We can discover numerous examples when he compares the spiritual, young, and enlightened Ireland to the materialistic, old, and philistine England and stresses the superiority of the former: 'ENGLAND is an old nation, the dramatic fervor has perhaps ebbed out of her. However that may be, most of the best dramas on the English stage from the times of Congreve and Sheridan and Goldsmith to our own day have been the work of Irishmen' (*LNI*, 69). The young imaginative Ireland is posed as the perfect antithesis of the old rational England: 'the literature of Ireland is still young, and on all sides of this road is Celtic tradition and Celtic passion crying for singers to give them voice. England is old and her poets must scrape up the crumbs of an almost finished banquet, but Ireland has still full tables' (*LNI*, 148). Sometimes he even tries to justify his stereotyping: 'I do not think it a national prejudice that makes me believe we are harder, a more masterful race than the comfortable English of our time' (*Ex*, 147). In these obvious stereotyping comments

Yeats is simply replacing one stereotype with another. He is acting out what Bhabha's critical description of the nationalist artist's strategy points to, that is the nationalist critic, 'caught in the problematic of image analysis, speaks against one stereotype but essentially, and inevitably, for another'.<sup>59</sup>

While the young Yeats tried to reject colonialist stereotypes of the Irish as the creation of the colonizers, his works nevertheless perpetuated the same views of the colonized. As Marjorie Howes has noted how Yeats's 'interest in Irish folklore, the Irish peasantry, and the occult can be read as commitments to the subaltern cultures and resistances of the colonized, or as forms of Orientalism, in which Yeats projected onto 'others' various exotic qualities and forms of knowledge that fascinated him'.<sup>60</sup> Therefore being somehow ambivalent about the peasantry Yeats often spread stereotypical presentations of them. Moreover his own stereotyping of the English simply uses the same criteria of stereotyping the other, only by reversing the places of the colonizer and the colonized. His later and more mature outlook, however, turns into the questioning of the validity of the system of thought that produces such stereotypes. Thus in 1904 he would ironically look back on this kind of stereotyping by criticizing the nationalists' fixations about England:

The patriots would impose on us heroes and heroines, like those young couples  
In the Gaelic plays, who might all change brides or bridegrooms in the dance and  
never find out the difference. The personifications need not be true even, if they  
are about our enemy, for it might be more difficult to fight out our necessary  
fight if we remembered his virtue at wrong moments' (*Ex*, 146).

Years later in a section of his *Autobiographies* written during 1920-22, Yeats expresses directly his contempt for and rage at the nationalist stereotypes of the Irish and English of which in an earlier age he was a supporter and a subscriber:

Young Ireland's prose had been as much occupied with Irish virtue as its poetry,  
and more with the invader's vices, and we were soon mired and sunk into such  
problems as to whether Cromwell was altogether black, the heads of the old Irish  
clans altogether white, the Danes mere robbers and church-burners ... and as to  
whether we were or were not once the great orators in the world. All the past had  
been turned into a melodrama with Ireland for blameless hero and poet; novelist



and historian had but one object, that we should hiss the villain, and only a minority doubted that the greater the talent the greater the hiss (*Au*, 205-06).

However, in the last years of the nineteenth century and in numerous essays and articles Yeats to a certain extent subscribed to the idea of fixity and essentialized identity in his descriptions of both the colonized and the colonizer. The young poet certainly was not among the minority who ‘doubted that the greater the talent the greater the hiss’.

## **COCNCLUSION**

To say that Yeats was intensely involved in an active, popular nationalism in the last two decades of nineteenth century is something of a truism. Yet his relationship and commitment to Irish nationalism was never easy; on the contrary it was often conflicted and sceptical. During the last decade of the nineteenth century he consistently defined himself as an active nationalist poet challenging the legacy of British colonialism. As a corollary to his anti-colonial nationalist activities, he was also engaged in a wide variety of poetic and prose works to reverse the demeaning stereotypes of the Irish. However, in both projects, the fluctuations, hesitations, and even contradictory remarks and attitudes were most of the time apparent or implied in his works.

In this chapter I have tried to focus on Yeats’s uneasy, ambivalent and changing engagements with the question of nationalism and (anti) colonial stereotypes, which I believe make him a suitable example of Homi Bhabha’s concept of the ‘hybrid identities’ which cannot be contained in the simple binary of colonizer/colonized. I have tried to elucidate some of the Young Yeats’s conflicted and sometimes contradictory attitudes regarding his involvement with Irish anti-colonial nationalism and his double-sided interaction with (anti) colonial stereotypes. The duality which exists in his works with regard to these two issues should make us wary of applying an either/or approach to his colonial status. He can best be approached as a subject characterized by flexibility, change, and fluidity rather than by fixity. His role as a

steadfast and unwavering anti-colonial figure, as some critics have proposed becomes problematic when we take into account his own uncertainties and doubts. On the other hand to portray him as an accomplice in the colonial mission and as a unionist is even less tenable a view. The problem with these two arguments is that, drawing on a partial reading of Yeats's works, one might be able to find evidence to justify either of them. However, what one gets by subscribing to either of these two opposite views is not a complete picture of Yeats, if the very concept of a complete picture be possible at all. Surprisingly, a considerable part of the postcolonial criticism of Yeats seems to ignore the unproductivity of considering colonial identities as necessarily fixed, static, and oppositional to each other. Labelling Yeats simply as a poet with colonialist attitudes or an anti-colonial revolutionary poet is the unavoidable outcome of such critical views, which do not take into account the complexity, development and duality of the Irish poet's mixed attitudes.

The changes, circularities and tensions which Yeats developed over time point to the similarities across the colonial divide, and remind us that the identities of the colonizer and the colonized are not to be seen as distinct, separate, and mutually opposed. Moreover, the impossibility of assigning trans-historical and inflexible attributes such as colonialist or anti-colonialist for defining a historical and ever-changing Yeats becomes clearer. Last but not least is the fact that Yeats's attitudes toward the question of colonial stereotypes, nationalism, and in a broader sense colonialism are more complicated and cannot be explained away by the simple binaries of the colonial divide. On the one hand we have his identification with and involvement in Irish nationalism and on the other we can witness a feeling of uncertainty and a kind of remoteness in his nationalist activities. The colonial influence is fluid and mutual, and the interaction between the colonizing and colonized cultures results in the creation of a colonial hybrid: 'the construction of a political object that is new, *neither the one nor the other*, properly alienates our political expectations, and changes, as it must, the very forms of our recognition of the moment of politics'.<sup>61</sup> The fact that Yeats's political attitudes were rarely straightforward and that we witness the presence of multiple identities and consciousnesses in Yeats's writings, reveals, after all, his

complicated and ambivalent status as a colonial subject. Moreover, this suggests that in the contact zone he belongs to 'neither the one nor the other' of the conflicting sides.

For a criticism which is engaged in bringing postcolonial theory to bear on Yeats studies it would be much more enabling and fruitful to free itself from pinning down the fixed and overused adjectives to the hybrid and complicated personality of the colonial subject. Yeats's is a position of ambivalence and hybridity. He epitomizes the complicated colonial situation of a conflicted identity, so I believe that instead of either celebrating him as a writer whose works transcend the colonialist legacy or attacking him for his tacit collaboration with the same legacy, it would be much more insightful and productive to reinvestigate his work and to unfold his complex relationship with the question of Ireland, Irish anti-colonial nationalism and British colonialism. Such an approach would ultimately reveal the relevance of Yeats and his work to the field of postcolonial studies.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In *Autobiographies*, for example, Yeats writes about his uncle's servant, Mary Battle, an illiterate woman who used to tell him stories 'rammed with every sort of old history and strange belief. Much of my *Celtic Twilight* is but her daily speech.' W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies* (London: Macmillan, 1961), 71.

<sup>2</sup> Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 102.

<sup>3</sup> Amrohini J. Sahay, 'Book reviews - The Location of Culture by Homi Bhabha'. *College Literature* (Feb., 1996).  
[http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qa3709/is\\_199602/ai\\_n8754098](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3709/is_199602/ai_n8754098)

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed account on the origins of nationalism see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), see also George Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland* (London: Routledge, 1995). For the rise of cultural nationalism in Ireland see John Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: The Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation State* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987).

<sup>5</sup> Joep Leerssen, *Mere Irish and Fíor-Ghael: Studies in the Idea of Irish Nationality, its Development and Literary Expression Prior to the Nineteen Century* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), 14. For different approaches to the question of Irish nationalism and colonialism see Richard Kearney, *Postnationalist Ireland: Politics, Culture, Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1997), and Stephen Howe, *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Charles Townshend, *Ireland: The 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (London: Arnold, 1999), 19.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>8</sup> Horace Reynolds, ed., 'Introduction', *Letters to the New Island* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 3-66, 14. Connor Cruise O'Brien 'Passion and Cunning: An Essay on the Politics of W. B. Yeats', in eds., A. Norman Jeffares and K.G.W. Cross, *In Excited Reverie: A Centenary Tribute to William Butler Yeats 1865-1939* (London, Macmillan, 1965), 207-78, 222. Barbara Seaward, 'Yeats and Transition', in *The Symbolic Rose* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 88-117, 99. Seamus Deane, *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature 1880-1980* (London: Faber, 1987), 46. Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), 275. Hazard Adams, 'Yeats and Antithetical Nationalism', in ed., Jonathan Allison, *Yeats's Political Identities: Selected Essays* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 309-24, 310. Richard Rankin Russell, 'W. B. Yeats and Eavan

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Boland: Postcolonial Poets?’ in ed., Deborah Fleming, *W. B. Yeats and Postcolonialism* (West Cornwall: Locust Hill Press, 2001), 101-132, 110.

<sup>9</sup> T.S. Eliot, ‘Yeats’, in *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), 252-62, 262.

<sup>10</sup> Note however that this was a reciprocal relationship. At the same time that Yeats’s love for Maud Gonne could be a reason behind Yeats’s nationalism, he used his nationalist activities to approach her as he used any other opportunity. Writing about his plans to build a ‘mystical Order’, Yeats confesses that “Maud Gonne shared this idea and I did not doubt that in carrying this out I should win her for myself. Politics were merely a means of meeting her but this was a link so perfect that would restore at once even in a quarrel the sense of intimacy.” Quoted in A. Norman Jeffares, *A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1968), 25.

<sup>11</sup> Fanon, Frantz, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin, 1990), 169.

<sup>12</sup> Nancy Cardozo, *Maud Gonne: Lucky Eyes and a High Heart* (London: Gollancz, 1979), 8.

<sup>13</sup> Seamus Deane, ‘General Introduction’, in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, vol. I. (Derry: Field Day Publications, 1991), xix-xxvi, xxv.

<sup>14</sup> For an account of these activities see Elizabeth Cullingford, *Yeats, Ireland and Fascism* (London: Macmillan, 1981). See also R. F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life I, The Apprentice Mage 1865-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). For an account by the mature Yeats of his political activities of these years see ‘The Stirring of the Bones’, in *Autobiographies*, 351-81.

<sup>15</sup> Jahan Ramazani, *The Hybrid Muse: Postcolonial Poetry in English* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 26.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Elizabeth Cullingford, *Yeats, Ireland and Fascism*, 39.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory, A Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 55.

<sup>18</sup> See for instance, Stephen Regan, ‘W. B. Yeats and Irish cultural politics in the 1890s’, in eds., Sally Ledger and Scott MacCracken, *Cultural Politics at the Fin De Siecle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 66-84, Connor Cruise O’Brien ‘Passion and Cunning: An Essay on the Politics of W. B. Yeats’, in eds., A. Norman Jeffares and K.G.W. Cross, *In Excited Reverie: A Centenary Tribute to William Butler Yeats 1865-1939* (London, Macmillan, 1965), 207-78, Spurgeon Thompson, ‘Yeats and Eugenicism: The Garrison Mentality in a Decolonizing Ireland’, in ed., Deborah Fleming, *W. B. Yeats and Postcolonialism* (West Cornwall, CT: Locust Hill Press,

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2001), 27-49, and finally Yug Mohit Chaudhury, *Yeats: The Irish Literary Revival and the Politics of Print* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2001).

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Richard Kearney, *Postnationalist Ireland: Politics, Culture, Philosophy*, (London, Routledge, 1997), 114.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in gen., ed., Seamus Deane, *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, vol. II. (Derry: Field Day Publications, 1991), 971.

<sup>21</sup> Daniel Corkery, *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1966), 13.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Kinsella, 'The Irish Writer', in *Davis, Mangan, Ferguson? Tradition and the Irish Writer* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1970), 57-70, 61-62.

<sup>23</sup> R. F. Foster, 'Protestant Magic: W.B. Yeats and the spell of Irish History', in ed., Jonathan Allison, *Yeats's Political Identities Selected Essays* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 83-105, 83.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Ellmann, *Yeats: The Man and the Masks* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), 73.

<sup>25</sup> R.F. Foster, *W.B. Yeats: A Life, I: The Apprentice Mage 1865-1914*, 193.

<sup>26</sup> Christina J. Thaut, "'The Rough Beast': A Postcolonial and Postmodern Yeats", in ed., Deborah Fleming, *W. B. Yeats and Postcolonialism* (West Cornwall: Locust Hill Press, 2001), 3-25, 9.

<sup>27</sup> Denis Donoghue, 'Ireland: Race, Nation, State: the Charles Stewart Parnell Lecture, 1998', in ed., Warwick Gould, *Yeats and the Nineties, Yeats Annual*, 14 (2001), 3-32, 15. Eugene O'Brien, *The Question of Irish Identity in the Writing of William Butler Yeats and James Joyce* (Ceredigion, Wales: The Edwin Mellen Press, Ltd. 1998), 153. Paul Scott Stanfield, *Yeats and Politics in the 1930s* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), 4.

<sup>28</sup> Marjorie Howes, *Yeats's Nations, Gender, Class, and Irishness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 29.

<sup>29</sup> Harold Orel, *The Development of William Butler Yeats: 1885-1900* (Lawrence: The University of Kansas Publications, 1968), 45.

<sup>30</sup> Patrick Kavanagh, 'William Butler Yeats', in ed., David Pierce, *W.B. Yeats Critical Assessments*, vol. 3 (Mountfield, East Sussex: Helm Information, 2000), 61-3. 61.

<sup>31</sup> See Yeats's notes on *The Wind among the Reeds* quoted in A. Norman Jeffares, *A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1968), 74-

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75. See also Jeffares comments in the same book, 22-24, and Yeats's *Autobiographies*, 254.

<sup>32</sup> A. Norman Jeffares, *A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1968), 22.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 41.

<sup>34</sup> Deirdre Toomey, 'Who Fears to Speak of Ninety-eight?' in ed., Warwick Gould, *Yeats and the Nineties, Yeats Annual*, 14 (2001), 209-61, 241-42.

<sup>35</sup> R.F. Foster, *W.B. Yeats: A Life, I: The Apprentice Mage*, xxviii.

<sup>36</sup> G. J. Watson. *Irish Identity and the Literary Revival: Synge, Yeats, Joyce and O'Casey*, 2nd ed. *Critical Studies in Irish Literature*, vol. 4 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 29.

<sup>37</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 7.

<sup>38</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 70.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in eds., Peter Childs and Patrick Williams, *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory* (Harlow: Longman, 1997), 57.

<sup>40</sup> Seamus Deane, 'General Introduction', in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, vol. I., xix-xxvi, xxv.

<sup>41</sup> Robert James Scally, *The End of Hidden Ireland: Rebellion, Famine, and Emigration*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 8.

<sup>42</sup> Lewis Perry Curtis, Jr., *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature* (Newton Abbott, Devon: David Charles Ltd., 1971). For other accounts of the English stereotypes of the Irish see Curtis's *Anglo-Saxons and Celts: A Study of Anti-Irish Prejudice in Victorian England* (Bridge-Port, Connecticut: University of Bridgeport, 1968), Maureen Waters, *The Comic Irishman* (Albany: State U of New York P., 1984), and Richard Ned Lebow, *White Britain and Black Ireland: The Influence of Stereotype on Colonial Policy* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1976).

<sup>43</sup> Alasdair D.F. Macrae, *W. B. Yeats: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), 64.

<sup>44</sup> Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Vintage, 1996), 104.

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- <sup>45</sup> Quoted in Marjorie Elizabeth Howes, *Yeats's Nations: Gender, Class, and Irishness*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 21.
- <sup>46</sup> Quoted in Edward Hirsch, 'The Imaginary Irish Peasant', in *PMLA*, 106:5. (Oct., 1991), 1116-1133, 1120.
- <sup>47</sup> Gregory Castle, *Modernism and the Celtic Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 68.
- <sup>48</sup> Yug Mohit Chaudhry, *Yeats The Irish Literary Revival and the Politics of Print* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2001), 155-56.
- <sup>49</sup> Edward Hirsch 'The Imaginary Irish Peasant', in *PMLA*, 106:5 (Oct., 1991), 1116-1133, 1122.
- <sup>50</sup> R.F. Foster, *W.B. Yeats: A Life, I*, 53. For Yeats's relation to Mathew Arnold, see Chris Corr, 'Matthew Arnold and the Younger Yeats: The Manoeuvrings of Cultural Aesthetics', in *Irish University Review*, 28.1 (1998), 11-27. See also John V. Kelleher, 'Matthew Arnold and the Celtic Revival,' in ed., Hary Levin, *Perspectives in Criticism* (New York: Russel and Russel, 1970), 197-221.
- <sup>51</sup> Marjorie Howes, 'That sweet insinuating feminine voice: hysterics, peasants and the Celtic movement', in *Yeats's Nations, Gender, Class, and Irishness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 16-43.
- <sup>52</sup> Rajeev S. Patke, 'Postcolonial Yeats', in ed., David Pierce, *W.B. Yeats Critical Assessments*, vol. 4 (Mountfield, East Sussex: Helm Information, 2000), 814-26, 824.
- <sup>53</sup> Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 238.
- <sup>54</sup> R.F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life, I: The Apprentice Mage 1865-1914*, 209.
- <sup>55</sup> *The Poetry of W. B. Yeats*, A. Norman Jeffares (London: Edward Arnold, 1961), 13.
- <sup>56</sup> Elizabeth Cullingford, *Yeats, Ireland and Fascism*, 48.
- <sup>57</sup> G. J. Watson. *Irish Identity and the Literary Revival: Synge, Yeats, Joyce and O'Casey*. 2nd ed. *Critical Studies in Irish Literature*, vol. 4, 66.
- <sup>58</sup> Jahan Ramazani, 'Is Yeats a Postcolonial Poet?' in ed., David Pierce, *W.B. Yeats Critical Assessments*, vol. 4, 794-813, 799.
- <sup>59</sup> Homi Bhabha, 'Representation and the Colonial Text: A Critical Exploration of Some Forms of Mimeticism', in ed., Frank Gloversmith, *The Theory of Reading*, ed. (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1984), 93-122, 105.



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<sup>60</sup> ‘Yeats and the Postcolonial’, in eds., Marjorie Howes and John Kelly, *The Cambridge Companion To W.B. Yeats* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 206-25, 207-08.

<sup>61</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 25.

## **‘TERRIBLE BEAUTY’ OR ‘NEEDLESS DEATH’? YEATS’S DUAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS SELF-SACRIFICE AND MARTYRDOM**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The second period of Yeats’s career spans the first 20 years of the twentieth century. These were most of the time turbulent years, the years of public controversies, the Easter Rising, international and civil war and unrest. The beginning years of the century were prolific years for Yeats as a playwright, he produced diverse plays such as *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, *The Hour-Glass*, *The King’s Threshold*, *The Shadowy Waters*, *Where There is Nothing*, *On Baile’s Strand*, *The Green Helmet*, and *The Player Queen*. In his poetic works the disappearance of the otherworldly, ecstatic atmosphere of the early lyrics and a new directness with which Yeats confronts reality are characteristic of this middle period. As Edmund Wilson aptly points out, we see a development in Yeats’s early poetry from ‘the fascination of fairyland as something inimical to life in the real world’ to his later poetry that faces ‘life’s hard conditions’.<sup>1</sup> His poetry becomes stronger, deeper and more realistic as he grows more mature. If as a young man the friendship with the old Fenian leader John O’Leary and the reckless beautiful revolutionary Maud Gonne had involved him in Irish nationalism, as a middle-aged poet his friendship with Lady Gregory marked an important re-orientation of his sense of political identity. Yeats’s long friendship with Gregory, the widow of a former governor of Ceylon, one of the British colonies, encouraged his interest in folklore and Irish theatre. In 1898 (together with Lady Gregory, George Moore, and Edward Martyn) Yeats founded the Irish Literary Theatre in Dublin, which became the Abbey Theatre in 1904. Over the years he moved away from his earlier nationalism towards an appreciation of the virtues of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy. What accelerated this development was his disillusionment and quarrels with the Catholic middle class, which was slowly rising to power. Among these quarrels the most important ones were the disturbances, which in 1907 followed the appearance of Synge’s masterpiece, *The Playboy of the Western World*, and the middle-class Dublin treatment of Hugh Lane’s bequest of paintings to the city in 1913.

What Foster describes as Yeats's 'quarrels with himself and others over the shape-changing phenomenon of Irish nationalism' could be seen as the major preoccupation of Yeats in the beginning decades of the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup>

W.B. Yeats was a complex man with many diverse interests and causes. As a young poet he was full of internal contradictions and seemed to be pulled in different directions, unable to decide on a clear path. Yeats's poetry abounds with instances of duality and many of his works entail transition, growth, complexity, change and conflict, as did his life. For example, Yeats could stand up to the English government in 1910, defying them by keeping the Abbey Theatre open on the day of Edward VII's death, while in the same year he would accept a Civil List pension from the same government. To make the case even more complicated, he would then refuse the prestigious offer of a knighthood in 1915 because he did not like anybody to say of him 'only for a ribbon he left us' (*L*, 604). It is due to these fluctuations that we should be wary of making Yeats completely and inflexibly conform to some ready-made positions such as nationalist, anti-nationalist, revolutionary, reactionary, colonialist or anti-colonialist. There are, moreover evident shifts of emphasis in Yeats's outlooks as he matures. Yeats himself was much concerned with the making and remaking of identity, which for him was a question of incessant conflict and re-construction. The poet was always aware of the opposite pulls, which were part and parcel of the cultural dilemma in which he was involved as a nationalist Anglo-Irish writer and citizen. In *The Celtic Twilight*, there is for example, a passage where he articulates his own need to reconcile these inherent ambivalences: 'It is one of the great troubles of life that we cannot have any unmixed emotions. There is always something in our enemy that we like, and something in our sweetheart that we dislike. It is this entanglement of moods which makes us old, and puckers our brows and deepens the furrows about our eyes' (*CT*, 130).

His relation to Irish nationalism has been the subject of extensive and intensive critical debate and in the recent years the introduction of postcolonial theory to this debate has significantly altered the terms upon which it had previously proceeded. Yeats's works

and by extension the poet himself have been described as colonial, anti-colonial, revolutionary, reactionary and so on. Much of this criticism has tended to ignore the dualities, ambivalences, and complexities which exist in the Irish poet's works. The combination of love and hate towards friends and enemies in the above quotation, for instance, is a characteristic trend in Yeats's relation to his country and its other, England.<sup>3</sup> This ambiguous mixture of love and hate is addressed in *The Location of Culture*, where the ambivalence of colonial relationships is discussed. Bhabha quotes Freud, who,

uses the analogy of feuds that prevail between communities with adjoining territories—the Spanish and the Portuguese, for instance—to illustrate the ambivalent identification of love and hate that binds a community together: 'it is always possible to bind together a considerable number of people in love, so long as there are other people left to receive the manifestation of their aggressiveness.' The problem is, of course, that the ambivalent identifications of love and hate occupy the same psychic space; and paranoid projections 'outwards' return to haunt and split the place from which they are made.<sup>4</sup>

The problem is when these two opposite feelings of love and hate 'occupy the same psychic space' which results in a splitting of that space. Elsewhere in the same book, he elaborates on this concept: 'splitting constitutes an intricate strategy of defense and differentiation in the colonial discourse. Two contradictory and independent attitudes inhabit the *same place* ... it is a strategy for articulating contradictory and coeval statements of belief'.<sup>5</sup>

Following the previous chapter and taking my point of departure from Bhabha's criticism of colonial relations as highly complex and ambivalent, in this chapter I will try to demonstrate some of the anxieties, the contradictions, the mixed feelings, and the internal conflicts which characterizes the middle-aged Yeats's works. This chapter sets out to trace and probe into the tensions, circularities, ambiguities, and changes which developed as Yeats wrote about and reacted to what was happening in Ireland in the opening decades of the twentieth century. The main texts I will concentrate on are *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, and 'Easter 1916'. I would argue that in these two works Yeats's stance is far from total endorsement or outright rejection of the nationalistic

fervour of his time. He adopts a reserved and qualified position as to his heroes' self-sacrifice and rising against the colonizers, both praising and at the same time questioning the plausibility of the course of action that these colonized figures take. Yeats's double position takes us back to the complex subject positions of colonial identities and the concepts of hybridity, ambivalence and the 'third space' discussed in postcolonial criticism. Bhabha has stressed the anxieties, ambivalences and complicities that inhabit the colonial situation. I think Yeats's oscillation between identifying with, and distancing himself from, the hot-headed nationalists of *Cathleen ni Houlihan* and 'Easter 1916' suggests the productivity of these concepts in a postcolonial reading of the Irish poet, as they enable us to look at Yeats's personality beyond the traditional dichotomies of colonial discourse. This kind of reading, I hope, enables us to free our readings of Yeats from restricting binaries such as colonizer/colonized, revolutionary/reactionary, and nationalist/unionist. It is also more productive in a postcolonial critique of Yeats whose case embodies the complexities of a poet looking for a kind of personal and national identity in a colonized country.

### ***CATHLEEN NI HOULIHAN***

The joint work of Yeats and Lady Gregory, *Cathleen ni Houlihan* celebrates and memorializes the 1798 rebellion of the United Irishmen against British imperial rule. It was first staged in 1902 in the Abbey theatre, the leading role played by Maud Gonne. A considerable number of critics have interpreted *Cathleen ni Houlihan* as Yeats's most directly nationalistic and revolutionary play. According to Alex Zwerdling *Cathleen ni Houlihan* 'is the closest that Yeats ever came to writing something which actually led to revolutionary action'.<sup>6</sup> The writers of *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture* believe that the play 'earned Yeats a place in the nationalist pantheon'.<sup>7</sup> Deirdre Toomey considers it as 'perhaps the strangest physical force drama ever written ... its power comes from the combination of a peaceful setting and the presentation of the call to revolution as deriving from a supernatural figure, the country itself', D.E.S. Maxwell describes Yeats's play as 'a patriotic call to arms', and George Watson, finally, observes that 'with the possible exceptions of the poem

‘September 1913’ and some of the late ballads on Parnell and Casement, this is the most intensely and narrowly nationalist of all Yeats’s writings’.<sup>8</sup> Certain lines of the play have a direct political resonance. For instance, when asked about the cause of her wandering, Cathleen, who symbolizes Ireland, laments the incursions of the ‘strangers’ in her house who have taken away her ‘four beautiful green fields’ (*VPL*, 222-23). Any Irish audience would have identified the strangers as the British colonial invaders of their country and the four fields as the four counties of Ireland.

*Cathleen ni Houlihan* proved a popular play, and it gained admirers even among extreme Irish Catholic nationalists such as Arthur Griffith, the founder of Sinn Fein, who was always suspicious of Yeats’s poetry and considered his works as a digression from the actual nationalistic struggle and as a misrepresentation of the cultural values of Catholic Ireland. Griffith was also the editor of *United Irishman* where Frank Fay had harshly criticized Yeats’s first two plays, *The Countess Cathleen* and *The Land of Heart’s Desire*, in an article on May 1901:

They do not inspire; they do not send men away filled with the desire for deeds ... Before he will be even on the road to achieving greatness as a dramatic poet, Mr. Yeats must tackle some theme of great, lasting and living interest. In Ireland we are at present only too anxious to shun reality. Our drama ought to teach us to face it. Let Mr. Yeats give us a play in verse or prose that will rouse this sleeping land ... This land is ours, but we have ceased to realise the fact. We want a drama that will make us realise it. We have closed our ears to the piercing wail that rises from the past; we want a drama that will open them, and in no uncertain words point out the reason for our failure in the past and the road to success in the future.<sup>9</sup>

Yeats’s third play seemed exactly to fulfil the above-mentioned political demands set out by Frank Fay. In fact, the power and the influence of his work went much further than Fay required. To the ardent nationalist P.S. O’Hegarty and other nationalists *Cathleen ni Houlihan* ‘was a sort of sacrament’, and he could not help wondering, ‘whether there has been in our time anything else quite so potent. In it surely the spirit of Ireland spoke to us, and we listened’.<sup>10</sup> Maude Gonne, who enthusiastically played the role of Cathleen, remembered proudly that ‘The effect of that play on the crowd which nightly filled the little hall in Clarendon Street was such that after the first

week, powerful intervention was used to evict us from it and so stop the performance'.<sup>11</sup> Stephen Gwynn, Secretary of the London branch of the Irish Literary Society and a distinguished man of letters, was so moved and terrified by the performance that on the way home he wondered whether 'such plays should be produced unless one was prepared for people to go out to shoot and be shot'.<sup>12</sup> A similar fear with regard to the destructive influence of the play is reflected in Bernard Shaw's confession to Lady Gregory: 'When I see that play I feel it might lead a man to do something foolish'.<sup>13</sup> These worries are echoed by Yeats himself many years later after the bloody events of Easter 1916, when in 'The Man and the Echo' he wonders: 'Did that play of mine send out / Certain men the English shot?' (*VP*, 383) Donald R. Pearce's testimony is another example of the electrifying appeal that Yeats's nationalistic play had on the Irish audience: 'One of the members of the seven-man Supreme Council of the I.R.B., which had planned that famous insurrection, tells me that he himself entered the political movement the day after he saw the opening performances of Yeats's *Cathleen ni Houlihan* in April, 1902, prior to which he 'had never had a political thought'.<sup>14</sup>

But what was Yeats's own relationship with his most nationalistic play which stirred so much agitation among its viewers? For one thing it was not consistent, changing over time. Comparing the developing and sometimes conflicting views about the Irish nationalism which Yeats expressed or implied in his different works chronologically shows that Yeats's position with regard to a national revolution was not the same over the years and it altered as he matured. The writer's seemingly patriotic and unquestioning support for the revolutionaries in *Cathleen ni Houlihan* is later changed into a rather detached and questioning outlook in 'Easter 1916'. While in the former work the Irish revolutionaries are praised as martyrs who will never be forgotten 'They shall be remembered for ever, / They shall be alive for ever, / They shall be speaking for ever, / The people shall hear them for ever' (*VPL*, 229), in the latter poem there is not such a reassurance, rather the nationalists' very sacrifice has somehow been brought under question: 'Was it needless death after all? / For England may keep faith / For all that is done and said. / We know their dream; enough / To know they

dreamed and are dead; / And what if excess of love / Bewildered them till they died?' (VP, 394) Later on in 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen' the brutality and violence of Irish civil war and its aftermath made him adopt a more pessimistic attitude compared to his early nationalist hopes and aspirations. He is now somehow disillusioned with his former political affiliations. Contemplating his youthful idealism the middle-aged poet sadly remembers how 'We too had many pretty toys when young; / A law indifferent to blame or praise, / ... / O what fine thought we had because we thought / That the worst rouges and rascals had died out' (VP, 428). And finally in his last years we come across the sarcastic tone of an experienced old man who no longer believes in the workability of revolution: 'Hurrah for revolution and more cannon shot! / A beggar upon horseback lashes a beggar upon foot. / Hurrah for revolution and cannon come again! / The beggars have changed places but the lash goes on' (VP, 590). What I want to argue here is that while we can observe the development in Yeats's idea about Irish nationalism by comparing the works he wrote over different periods of time, a close reading of some of his writings shows a juxtaposition of different and sometimes contrary attitudes in the same work. In other words, the heterogeneity of stances and the conflict of voices in Yeats could be realised not only between one work and the other but also within individual works. One such work is Yeats's most acclaimed nationalist and revolutionary play, *Cathleen ni Houlihan*.

As to the genesis of his play Yeats claimed:

I am a Nationalist, and certain of my intimate friends have made Irish politics the business of their lives, and this made certain thoughts habitual with me, and an accident made these thoughts take fire in such a way that I could give them dramatic expression. I had a very vivid dream one night, and I made *Cathleen ni Houlihan* out of this dream' (Ex, 116).

Admitting that he is a nationalist and has close friendships with some politically active nationalists, Yeats refers to the incident which has led to the birth of the play. While his earlier play, *The Land of Heart Desire*, has been, 'in a sense, the call of the heart, the heart seeking its own dream; this play is the call of country' (UP II. 284). In his first appraisal of the play, in the *United Irishman* newspaper in 1902, he comments on



the content of *Cathleen ni Houlihan*:

My subject is Ireland and its struggle for independence. The scene is laid in the West of Ireland at the time of the French landing. I have described a household preparing for the wedding of the son of the house. Everyone expects some good thing from the wedding. The bridegroom is thinking of his bride, the father of the fortune which will make them all more prosperous, and the mother of a plan of turning this prosperity to account by making her youngest son a priest, and the youngest son of a greyhound pup the bride promised to give him when she marries. Into this household comes Kathleen Ni Houlihan herself, and the bridegroom leaves his bride, and all the hopes come to nothing. It is the perpetual struggle of the cause of Ireland and every other ideal cause against private hopes and dreams, against all that we mean when we say the world.<sup>15</sup>

Here Yeats is directly pointing to the political message of his patriotic play, its call for armed resistance against the British colonizers, and the need for sacrificing personal aspirations and happiness to the greater good of Ireland. The impression one gets from the above quotation is that of a committed nationalist poet who has written a piece of drama in the service of the national cause and to arouse patriotic emotions. Contrary to his belief that literature should not be used as a propagandist tool, in *Cathleen ni Houlihan* Yeats slips into the world of political and propagandistic literature. But two years later he is no longer comfortable with the way his play is being interpreted and so tries to play down the political and propagandist aspect of his work:

It may be said that it is a political play of a propagandist kind. This I deny. I took a piece of human life, thoughts that men had felt, hopes they had died for, and I put this into what I believe to be a sincere dramatic form. I have never written a play to advocate any kind of opinion and I think that such a play would be necessarily bad art, or at any rate a very humble kind of art.<sup>16</sup>

In retrospect he sets out to deny the political implications of his most popular and revolutionary play. Yeats was quite aware of the political impact of his play and even during the reproduction of it in 1904, the same year that he made the above-mentioned remarks, he wrote to Lady Gregory; '*Kathleen* [sic] seemed more rebellious than I ever heard it, and --- solemnly begged me to withdraw it for fear it would stir up a conspiracy and get us all into trouble'.<sup>17</sup> Years later, however, he would tell the playwright Philip Barry that '*Cathleen ni Houlihan* was propaganda, but I was not

conscious of it at the time'.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps Foster, who believes that Yeats's wavering stance 'suggests unease, as well as collaboration', offers the best explanation for the changes in Yeats's remarks about the play.<sup>19</sup> Yeats's ambivalent, anxious and changing attitude towards his work and its passionate and powerful message, however, is not just confined to the remarks he made about the play. It is articulated in the play itself and in his future works as well, so that even up to the end of his life a sense of guilt and self-questioning resurfaces and troubles him poignantly: 'All that I have said and done, / Now that I am old and ill, / Turns into a question till / I lie awake night after night, / Did that play of mine send out / Certain men the English shot?' (*VP*, 632)

*Cathleen ni Houlihan* is based upon a specific event in Irish history, the rebellion of 1798, when Wolfe Tone, the famous Protestant patriot, tried to drive the British out of Ireland with the help of French forces who landed at Killala in August 1798. The uprising, however, was a failure: Tone was arrested and condemned to death, and consequently committed suicide in his cell. The central character *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, a famous feminine personification of Ireland, enters a peasant cottage as a poor old woman. Strangers whom she hopes to drive out of her house have taken the old woman's green fields. The peasant family is preparing for the wedding of the elder son. They offer money to the old woman, which she rejects, asking for something far greater than material help, that is, self-sacrifice. She then goes out to join her supporters. Michael, the would-be bridegroom, enchanted by the old woman's words, gives up his family and his future bride and rushes to the help of the old woman who by the end of the play is not old any more, but is miraculously transformed into a young girl who has 'the walk of a queen' (*VPL*, 231).

A number of critics have read the play as a kind of glorification of self-sacrifice and heroic action, and Cathleen as a fatal temptress, a bloodthirsty, and even a vampire-like figure.<sup>20</sup> It is believed that the play preaches the absolute commitment of the individual to the national cause and thus romanticizes blood-sacrifice. Describing those who choose to follow her call, Cathleen says:

It is a hard service they take that help me.  
Many that are red-checked now will be pale-checked;  
many that have been free to walk the hills and the  
bogs and the rushes will be sent to walk hard streets  
in far countries; many a good plan will be broken;  
many that have gathered money will not stay to  
spend it; many a child will be born and there will be  
no father at its christening to give it a name. They  
that have red cheeks will have pale cheeks for my  
sake, and for all that, they will think they are well  
paid (*VPL*, 229).

Then she chants the famous and moving lines about the honorable fate of the patriots who sacrifice their lives for the sake of their country; 'They shall be remembered for ever, / They shall be alive for ever, / They shall be speaking for ever, / The people shall hear them for ever'. When offered money and food, she rejects them and solemnly declares, 'If any one would give me help he must / give me himself, he must give me all', requiring death from her prospective followers (*VPL*, 229 & 226). At the end she is transformed into a young queen, a transformation which is similar to the rejuvenation of the figures such as Dracula and vampire through blood-drinking.

There has been a long history of devotion to and belief in Cathleen ni Houlihan since the middle ages in Ireland. The Irish patriots who were ready to sacrifice their personal wishes and aspirations in her alter have treated her as a goddess and a maternal idol. The depiction of nation as a woman, either as a beloved or as mother has long been a distinctive feature of most nationalist discourses. John Mcleod asserts that: 'In using women as icons of the nation, nationalist representations reinforce images of the passive female who depends upon active males to defend her honour'.<sup>21</sup> Commenting on the motif of love-death in Irish nationalist literature, Carmel Jordan notes: 'From the dawn of Irish history, Ireland has been personified as a woman and was often referred as a beautiful rose. Through the centuries of British occupation, Irish poet patriots wrote beautiful love poems to this fatal rose declaring their willingness to die for her, and often proved their sincerity by actually dying for her'.<sup>22</sup> As an actual example of these warrior-poets, Carmel mentions Joseph Plunkett, a young poet and one of the executed leaders of the Easter Rebellion. In one of his poems, 'The Little

Black Rose shall be Red at Last', Plunkett addresses Ireland and his fiancée: 'Praise God if this my blood fulfills the doom / When you, dark rose, shall redden into bloom'. Immediately after his marriage to Grace Gifford in the small chapel of the prison, the young rebel-poet is directed towards his execution. Carmel points out the similarity between this actual scene and what Yeats had portrayed in *Cathleen ni Houlihan* years before Easter 1916: 'Plunkett's actions just before his death remind us of the actions of the young man in Yeats's play *Cathleen ni Houlihan*. In the play, Cathleen (Ireland), played by Maud Gonne, lures young Michael away from his bride on the eve of his wedding'.<sup>23</sup> This is just one revealing instance of the close interrelationship between art and politics in Ireland.

The traditional background of the play comes from the Aisling vision poems in which Ireland is depicted as the beloved who looks forward to freedom from the foreigners through the heroic struggles of her lovers. Yeats's play seems to build upon this tradition, but his relation to this tradition is more complex than it appears. Although at first glance he seems to be subscribing to the concept of individual sacrifice for the sake of a public cause, there are some moments in the play that hint at his unease or at least suspicion towards the cult of blind sacrifice and bloodshed. Yeats treats Michael's and by extension Irish patriots' total and absolute commitment to Cathleen with an ambiguity that questions the plausibility of their actions. This sense of anxiety is ushered in through the dramatic change in Michael's behavior when he confronts the old woman and also through other characters' reactions to what the elder son of the family decides to do: that is, to leave his young bride and family and to follow the siren call of the old woman. They see Michael as somebody who has been metamorphosed, someone who has lost self-control such that his actions border on insanity. This metamorphosis is due to Cathleen's enchanting remarks, which have had a bewitching effect on Michael's character. Total and unquestioning commitment to an idea, Yeats suggests, might lead to mental exhaustion and may result in madness. In the play Michael does not think about his actions. Rather, in spite of his family's suspicions about the old woman, he becomes entranced by Cathleen's words. As Marjorie Howes points out, 'Cathleen does not reason with Michael or persuade him;

she bewitches or hypnotizes him'.<sup>24</sup> When the old woman sings a song which has been made for her, Michael says 'I do not know what that song means, / but tell me something I can do for you', which implies a lack of understanding on his part as to what he is going to undertake (*VPL*, 228). Then when Cathleen sings another song about the fate of those who help her, Michael is so absorbed and stunned by her song that he looks like a man who, to use her mother's description, 'has got the touch' (*VPL*, 229). When his mother Bridget asks her younger son Peter to urge Michael not to leave his family, Peter answers resignedly: 'It's no use. He doesn't hear a word we're saying'. Michael's clothes slip from his hand and he forgets about his forthcoming wedding altogether. He takes no notice of his would-be wife, Delia, and as if hypnotized, looks at her like a stranger. He has now forgotten everything and everybody, so when his mother speaks about his wedding and the clothes he should wear, Michael's remarks show his total absent-mindedness, 'What wedding are you talking of? What clothes / will I be wearing to-morrow?' (*VPL*, 229)

Marjorie Howes has argued that *Cathleen ni Houlihan* betrays Yeats's anxieties about the nature of Irish nationalism as mass politics. According to Howes, Cathleen and the invisible cheering crowd of the play have the same function, to hypnotize and to lure Michael out of his wedding into the dark and unknown realm of self-sacrifice. Thus it is the combination of the cheering crowd and Cathleen's songs that traps Michael:

Symbolically, Cathleen and the crowd are equivalent. The crowd's cheers even perform the same hypnotic function as Cathleen's song ... As Michael's sacrifice (or more accurately, his forgetting) of his entire private existence and his trance-like submission suggest, the figure of Cathleen as a mystic devouring mother in this play is specifically a figure for the dissolution of the individual subject into the larger unity of a crowd.<sup>25</sup>

The equation of extreme nationalism with the concepts of excess, frenzy, folly and madness is re-enacted again and again throughout Yeats's later works, in poems such as 'September 1913', 'No Second Troy', 'All Things can Tempt Me', 'Easter 1916', and 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen'. In 'September 1913', for instance, he refers to 'All that delirium of the brave' referring to the dead Irish revolutionaries' passionate

enthusiasm and zeal. He then speculates that if such martyrs of Irish emancipation as Robert Emmet, Wolfe Tone, and Edward Fitzgerald were to come back to contemporary Ireland people would encounter them, crying: “Some woman’s yellow hair / Has maddened every mother’s son” (VP, 290).

The play’s ending and the temporary changes Yeats made to it for the first production is another example which uncovers the wavering, uncertainty and tension he felt about any kind of fixed political allegiance and revolutionary action. Originally Michael is not sure about what to do. He is depicted as someone with mixed emotions, and so does not rush out unhesitatingly to join the French troops. He is silent and thoughtful at the end, as if uncertain with regard to the outcome of his actions. As to his final exit, the stage directions read: ‘[Michael breaks away from Delia, stands for a second at the door, then rushes out, following the Old Woman’s voice. Bridget takes Delia, who is crying silently, into her arms]’ (VPL, 231). Caught between the demands of a family life and the claims of the motherland, Michael, at the last moment stands for a second at the door and then leaves the house. His hesitation suggests the lure of opposite pulls, which make his decision so difficult. This version was more in line with Yeats’s questioning, hesitating and doubtful character. It also betrayed his anxiety and tension as to the right action to take. It was, however, completely out of line with Maud Gonne who considered it a weak ending. Like Cathleen whose role she was playing, total, unwavering and unquestioning obedience of the individual were expected characteristics of a devoted nationalist. It was at her suggestion that Yeats made some temporary changes to the ending. While practicing the play for its first production she wrote to him:

We rehearsed Kathleen tonight, it went splendidly all but the end. It doesn’t make a good curtain — We are all of opinion that Michael ought to go *right* out of the door instead of standing HESITATING. It doesn’t seem clear if he doesn’t go out. If he goes out Delia can throw herself on Bridget’s shoulder in tears which makes a much better end. Please write at once and say if we may do that. Russell & Miss Young & the Fays & all the actors want it & think it is much better indeed *necessary*.<sup>26</sup>

Yeats conceded and made the requested changes. However, he restored the initial ending later on, a fact which points to Yeats's inclination to dramatize the uncertainty and tension in Michael. It also suggests Yeats's own self-quarrelling with regard to the message of the play, the unquestioning sacrifice of the sons to the blood-demanding motherland.

On the surface the play seems to express an approval of and admiration for the ardent nationalist aspirations of Michael and those who unquestionably join Cathleen. Nevertheless, it also implies disapproval or at least a reserved qualification with regard to the single-mindedness with which the orthodox nationalists act. Although *Cathleen ni Houlihan* gives the impression of an art which supports extreme and active nationalist movements of the time, there are some moments in the play that betray the insidious sense of unease and duality its author was struggling with. In other words if from one point of view Yeats's play can be read as a kind of normalization of violence, from another it could be interpreted as a questioning of that violence. Michael's and by extension the Irish patriots' devotion to Cathleen ni Houlihan is treated with a certain ambiguity and doubt. In a letter to his father just a few years before writing *Cathleen ni Houlihan* he had written: 'The Parnellite papers are already issuing invitations to the French to come over '& bring their traps' & 'make a long stay' & the like. This kind of stir will I am afraid interfere with all mere literary movements, if it goes on' (CL II, 282-83). This is certainly not in line with the revolutionary and enthusiastic fervor of the nationalists in *Cathleen ni Houlihan* or those among its audience. Here Yeats shows no sign of the enthusiasm to welcome the French troops as allies to drive off English occupiers from Ireland. However in *Cathleen ni Houlihan* the main background of the play is the landing of the French forces at Killala and the warm and enthusiastic welcome they receive from the Irish nationalists.

What Edward Larrissy has termed as 'the heterogeneity of register in Yeats's work' is quite apt here and elsewhere in the Irish poet's writings.<sup>27</sup> Many poems by Yeats involve shift, growth, change and conflict. However, it is not only between different

works he wrote in different times that we see the poet's undecidability, hesitation and change of position. Quite often we can discern the presence of different and sometimes conflicting perspectives within the same work and *Cathleen ni Houlihan* is one of these works. This brings us back to the internal uncertainty inherent in Yeats as an Anglo-Irish writer and warns against the hasty application of the ready-made binary divisions of colonizer and colonized. We should be aware of the dangers and the limitations of fixity in ascribing a pre-set identity to the ever-changing and hybrid character of the colonial subject. Colonial identities are not fixed and static. Rather they consist of complex multiple attitudes and different subject positions. Yeats's relation to the Irish anti-colonial nationalist struggle embodies the multiplicity of positions he took during his career. Even his most acclaimed revolutionary play, *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, betrays signs of doubt and qualification in the character of its author. Both in the play itself and in Yeats's comments about it, before and after its composition and at different times, we can discover a sense of unease, fissure, development and complexity with regard to his relationship with the mainstream revolutionary nationalism in Ireland. It is exactly the presence of these multiple beliefs and an internal sense of division that should make us 'aware of the dangers of the fixity and fetishism of identities within the calcification of colonial cultures'.<sup>28</sup>

## **ESTRANGEMENT**

After *Cathleen ni Houlihan* Yeats gradually became estranged from and disillusioned with the Irish nationalists who expected him to continue writing plays in the propagandist and popular vein of *Cathleen ni Houlihan*. Radical nationalists such as Arthur Griffith, founder of Sinn Fein strongly believed that literature should be in the service of political opinions. But Yeats would starkly attack this view as 'the enemy of the artist because it arms his uninspired moment against his inspiration. What was once inspiration is systematized and is used by the heavier part of the mind to strengthen itself against the finer. A mechanism is created which may attack life itself' (*Mem*, 170). In Yeats' manifesto the main obligation of the artist was to express life wholly and freely and not to use literature as a political tool: 'A Community that is



opinion-ridden, even when those opinions are in themselves noble, is likely to put its creative minds into some sort of a prison' (*Ex*, 115). Yeats's quarrels with the nationalists over the relationship between literature and politics were reflected in the articles he wrote in *Samhain*, the literary pamphlet of the Abbey Theatre. In the volumes published after the performance of *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, that is, from 1903 onward we can trace the main contrasts between his ideas and those of the popular nationalism of his day. Yeats regards the intolerance of the pulpit and the newspaper, which for him is representative of the extreme nationalism in Ireland, as the main enemies of a free literature, thus his main objection is 'to the rough-and-ready conscience of the newspaper and the pulpit in a matter so delicate and so difficult as literature' (*Ex*, 111). A similar view is expressed years later in 1935 when, in a radio broadcast, he talks about the origins of the Irish Literary Movement and the Abbey Theatre, and gives us his view of the political and literary situation in Ireland at the beginning of the twentieth century:

Unionist Ireland was a shabby and pretentious England where we would have met nothing but sneers. Nationalist Ireland was torn with every kind of political passion and prejudice, wanting, insofar as it wanted any literature at all, Nationalist propaganda disguised as literature. We wanted plays about life, not about opinions-Ireland for their sole theme. A work of art is any piece of life, seen through the eyes or experienced in the soul, completely expounded. We insisted, and the Abbey Theatre today still insists, upon every freedom necessary to that exposition. People accused us of all kinds of things, but we had no axe to grind; our enemies had the axes (*CW X*, 255).

Criticising both unionist and nationalist Ireland, what Yeats displays here is his capacity for a politically critical distance from both.

According to Gregory Castle, 'The sense of disillusionment with respect to the aspirations of Irish nationalism and the philistinism that he regarded as the social concomitant of nationalist political radicalism led Yeats to a recognition of the problematic nature of his own commitment to nationalism'.<sup>29</sup> In an article entitled 'The Irish National Theatre and Three Sorts of Ignorance', published in *The United Irishman*, 24 October 1903, Yeats expresses his anxieties and fears of what he regards

as an obstacle to the freedom of expression. His targets are Gaelic propagandists, ignorant priests and politicians whom he accuses of 'obscurantism'. For him these three groups are the true enemies of Irish intellectual movement: 'Extreme politics in Ireland were once the politics of intellectual freedom also, but now, under the influence of a violent contemporary paper, and under other influences more difficult to follow, even extreme politics seem about to unite themselves to hatred of ideas' (CW X, 99). The interesting point here is the use of 'even' which shows that up to now he has not regarded extreme politics of nationalism as a force against intellectual freedom, certainly not when his *Cathleen ni Houlihan* had been on stage. But after the nationalists' protests against Synge's play; *The Playboy of the Western World* in 1907, Yeats comes to associate extreme nationalism with the promotion of hatred. Later on he attacks the nationalists who could not tolerate an exposition of the weak points of Irish character, and when some artists show the true characteristics of Irish personality in their works, they are accused 'of changing their policy for the sake 'of the servants of the English men who are among us''. He then complains of the nationalists' intolerance towards the slightest criticism of the Irish peasant and questions the simple binary stereotyping of 'good' Irish versus 'bad' English:

Everyone knows who knows the country-places intimately, that Irish countrywomen do sometimes grow weary of their husbands and take a lover. I heard one very touching tale only this summer. Everyone who knows Irish music knows that 'The Red-haired Man's Wife' is sung of an Irish woman, ... These things are inconvenient one thinks when one is under that heavy shadow, for it is easier to go on believing that not only with us is virtue and Erin, but that virtue has no bounds, for in that way our hands may not grow slack in the fight. It will be safer to go on, one says, thinking about the Irish country people, as if they were 'picturesque objects', 'typical peasants', as the phrase is, in the foreground of a young lady's water-colour (CW X, 99, 100).

What he himself as a young artist was somehow responsible for bringing about has now turned out to be problematic and inconvenient. The change in his outlook towards the colonialist and nationalist stereotypes is quite evident here and in another passage when he reacts to the hostile treatment of the Dublin middle-class to Synge's controversial play *The Playboy of the Western World*: 'The outcry against *The Playboy* was an outcry against its style, against its way of seeing; and when the

audience called Synge 'decadent' - a favourite reproach from the objective everywhere - it was but troubled by the stench of its own burnt cakes' (*Ex*, 253). While throughout his early years he had contributed considerably to the stereotyped anti-colonial images of good, pure and oppressed colonized Irish versus bad, corrupt and oppressing colonizing English, now he is questioning and criticizing the cultural prejudices and the unquestioned pieties of his fellow countrymen.

In the first decade of the twentieth century Yeats became increasingly engaged in bitter quarrels with hard-line nationalists and as a consequence withdrew from political life. In a confidential letter to his friend Lady Gregory, he pondered: 'I imagine as I withdraw from politics my friends among the nationalists will grow less, at first at any rate, and my foes more numerous ... Between my politics and my mysticism I shall hardly have my head turned with popularity' (*L*, 350-51). Nationalists denounced and rioted against Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*, an act that for Yeats was a sign of intolerance and narrow-mindedness. The controversy surrounding the Impressionist paintings owned by Hugh Lane made Yeats even more disillusioned with Irish political and social life. Lane proposed to bequest his Impressionist paintings to Dublin if the city would build a gallery to house them. The scheme failed because the Dublin catholic middle classes who composed the backbone of Irish nationalism simply refused to provide the necessary funds. For the idealistic Yeats this was a sign of their lack of grace and appreciation for high art, a penny-counting mentality. The last but not the least public event which disaffected Yeats' understanding of middle-class Catholic nationalism and its leaders was the general strike of the Dublin Tramway Company workers when he sided with the strikers against the church and the employers, notably William Martin Murphy, the owner of the company and a leading figure in middle-class Dublin society. All these events disappointed Yeats so much that he lost his hopes for the restoration of what he regarded as the true and noble Irish identity, and began to question and reconsider his own relation to Irish nationalism. As he was witnessing the emergence of what he regarded as a money-grabbing class who cared for nothing except their materialistic gains, Yeats became more gradually and intensely involved in rancorous controversies

with the leaders of middle-class nationalism. His resentful dissatisfaction with the course Irish nationalism was taking is given eloquent expression in poems such as 'To a Wealthy Man', 'September 1913', 'Paudeen', 'To a Shade', and 'On those that hated *The Playboy of the Western World*, 1907'. In the notes to these poems (which were included in *Responsibilities*) Yeats gives a summary of his gradual alienation from the mainstream nationalist movement in Ireland during the past years:

In the thirty years or so during which I have been reading Irish newspapers, three public controversies have stirred my imagination. The first was the Parnell controversy. There were reasons to justify a man's joining either party, but there were none to justify, on one side or on the other, lying accusations forgetful of past service, a frenzy of detraction. And another was the dispute over *The Playboy*. There may have been reasons for opposing as for supporting that violent, laughing thing, though I can see the one side only, but there cannot have been any for the lies, for the unscrupulous rhetoric spread against it in Ireland, and from Ireland to America. The third prepared for the Corporation's refusal of a building for Sir Hugh Lane's famous collection of pictures ... 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 ... In Ireland I am constantly reminded of that fable of the futility of all discipline that is not of the whole being. Religious Ireland-and the Pious Protestants of my childhood were signal examples-thinks of divine things as a round of duties separated from life and not as an element that may be discovered in all circumstance and emotion, while political Ireland sees the good citizen but as a man who holds to certain opinions and not as a man of good will. Against all this we have but a few educated men and all the remnants of an old traditional culture among the poor. Both were stronger forty years ago, before the rise of our new middle class which made its first public display during the nine years of the Parnellite split, showing how base at moments of excitement are minds without culture (*VP*, 818-19).

Disparaging both religious, whether Catholic or Protestant, and political Ireland as uncultured and fanatical, Yeats's only hope are now a few upper class educated men and some poor people with a traditional culture. But they are threatened by the unfortunate rise of the Irish middle class who are endangering Ireland's cultural and consequently its political future. In 'To a Wealthy Man' Yeats expresses his dissatisfaction at the failure of Ireland to appreciate the generous gift of the French Impressionist paintings by Sir Hugh Lane to the Dublin Municipal Gallery. This poem, as Yeats writes in a letter, is addressed to an imaginary correspondent, though it

could be implied from the same letter that Yeats might have had Lady Ardilaun in mind while writing the poem (*L*, 573). ‘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, / That things it were a pride to give / Are what the blind and ignorant town / Imagines best to make it thrive’ (*VP*, 287). Yeats’s contempt for the Irish middle-class is reflected in the stereotypical and pejorative names he uses to represent them, ‘Paudeen’ and ‘Biddy’, coarse diminutives of Patrick and Bridget. Their opinions, according to Yeats, do not count in the matters of high art and it is out of the question for an aristocrat to ask his the permission of his inferiors in such matters. At least the Italian noblemen in the past would not have done it, they did not care ‘What th’ onion-sellers thought or did’. But now Dublin is under the influence of a narrow-minded and base class, the home of Paudeens and Biddys, it is a ‘blind and ignorant town’, and that is what makes the poet indignant and resentful. At the end he urges the upper-class men to ignore the base materialistic concerns of their inferiors and be true guardians of high art: ‘Let Paudeens play at pitch and toss, / 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!’ (*VP*, 288)

The poet’s severe attacks on the Catholic middle-class for what he considers as their philistinism, gracelessness and their indifference to the plight of the country continues in poems such as ‘Paudeen’ when the speaker criticizes contemptuously and in stereotypical terms the servile materialism of the Irish lower and middle classes: ‘Indignant at the fumbling wits, the obscure spite / Of our old Paudeen in his shop, I stumbled blind / Among the stones and thorn-trees ...’ (*VP*, 291) Yeats’s disenchantment with the nationalist movement is also given vigorous expression in ‘September 1913’, when he excoriates the materialistic values of what he regards as a new-born Catholic middle-class, and laments the loss of romantic Irish heroes. Like the other two poems this one also begins with an image of greedy money-collectors: ‘What need you, being come to sense, / But fumble in a greasy till / And add the halfpence to the pence / And prayer to shivering prayer, until / You have dried the

marrow from the bone?’ (VP, 289) By using the imagery of a ‘greasy till’ and of ‘shivering prayer’ Yeats implies that his targets are a Catholic shop-keeping class. Their marrowless bones suggest a lack of vitality and can be read as a sexual imagery Yeats used to employ in other poems such as ‘On those that hated *The Playboy of the Western World*, 1907’. In that poem he compares Irish middle-class to eunuchs looking at the masculine body of Don Juan when he is passing through Hell, ‘Once, when midnight smote the air, / Eunuchs ran through Hell and met / On every crowded street to stare / Upon great Juan riding by: / Even like these to rail and sweat / Staring upon his sinewy thigh’ (VP, 294). In his Memoirs this comparison is made directly:

... the political class in Ireland- the lower-middle class from whom the patriotic associations have drawn their journalists and their leaders for the last ten year- have suffered through the cultivation of hatred as the one energy of their movement, a deprivation which is the intellectual equivalent to the removal of the genitals. Hence the shrillness of their voices. They contemplate all creative power as the eunuchs contemplate Don Juan as he passes through Hell on the white horse (*Mem*, 176).

In both instances Yeats is using sexual impotency as a metaphor for the middle-class nationalists. It was Ireland’s failure, in Yeats’ view, to be heroic and manly, that had stung him into venting his savage indignation at the nationalists.

In his portrayal of the typical Irish nationalist as an emasculated figure Yeats is somehow subscribing to the infamous colonialist view which considers the colonized as weak and feminine. Believing that the Catholic middle class which was the backbone of Irish nationalism had forgotten the history of their country and betrayed their martyrs by neglecting their memory, in ‘September 1913’ the poet mourns the death of heroic patriots such as Edward Fitzgerald, Robert Emmet, Wolfe Tone and John O’Leary, the nationalists who sacrificed their lives fighting for Irish freedom. These heroes exemplified Irish nationalism for Yeats. So with their death and in the absence of heroes or martyrs among the present nationalists he sees no hope for the future of the country. The disappointed poet is resentful and pessimistic, since the middle classes are doing nothing to save Ireland, so he sadly and indignantly muses:

‘Romantic Ireland’s dead and gone, / It’s with O’Leary in the grave’ (*VP*, 289). But one particular event proved Yeats’s belief in the disappearance of romantic nationalism in Ireland as wrong, and set his internal tensions in motion once again: the Easter Rising of 1916. In the 1916 edition of *Responsibilities* he had to confess, ‘‘Romantic Ireland’s dead and gone’ sounds old-fashioned now. It seemed true in 1913, but I did not foresee 1916. The late Dublin Rebellion, whatever one can say of its wisdom, will long be remembered for its heroism. ‘They weighed so lightly what they gave,’ and gave too in some cases without hope of success’’.<sup>30</sup>

### **‘EASTER 1916’**

Yeats’s famous poem, which commemorates the Easter rising of 24 April 1916, was written in the aftermath of the unsuccessful nationalist uprising in Dublin against British rule. On that decisive day in Irish contemporary history, under the leadership of Patrick Pearse and James Connolly around 1600 members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood rose against the colonial rule of England. They stormed several major buildings in Dublin, most importantly the General Post Office, and issued a proclamation of independence demanding a free Irish republic. They held out until 29 April but after fierce fighting and with the arrival of the British auxiliary forces the Irish were forced to surrender. The British government executed fifteen of the Rising leaders in May 1916, a hasty deed which turned the initially unpopular rising into a popular myth.

At the time of Rising Yeats was in England staying with Sir William Rothenstein’s family, and he would be surprised by the coming news. His first reaction to the unexpected events of the Easter Rising is reflected in the letter he wrote on 11 May to Lady Gregory: ‘I had no idea that any public event could so deeply move me – and I am very despondent about the future. At the moment I feel all the work of years has been overturned, all the bringing together of classes, all the freeing of Irish literature and criticism from politics’ (*L*, 613). The mixture of respect and annoyance, grief and horror, which would later permeate ‘Easter 1916’, is quite evident in this letter. On the

one hand, Yeats cannot deny the deep effect the Rising has had on his outlook, and on the other hand, he cannot help expressing his disappointment and discomfort as to the outcomes of that disturbing event. He had already declared the death of Romantic Ireland in 'September 1913' and it came to him as a shock that the members of the money-grabbing Catholic middle-class he had so harshly criticized in poems such as 'Paudeen' and 'September 1913' could rise to such a heroic stature as martyrs for a high ideal. The same people, who had up to then been the object of his contempt, are now depicted in a favourable way. Their heroic deed caused him to revise his sense of contemporary Ireland.

In the first stanza of the poem he gives a general introduction of the rebels and mentions his brief acquaintance with them. Contrary to Seamus Deane's emphasis that Yeats 'denies the bourgeois character of the Irish rebellion in order to preserve it as an aristocratic emblem caught in the tide of bourgeois life', here the poet does not hesitate to refer to the bourgeois background of the revolutionaries.<sup>31</sup> Only this time the fact that the rebels belong to the middle-class coming from behind counter or desk does not imply any pejorative sense. Rather, they are somehow being romanticized by their bright complexion, their 'vivid faces' suggesting their vigorous liveliness, powerful feelings and youthful enthusiasm: 'I have met them at close of day / Coming with vivid faces / From counter or desk among grey / Eighteenth-century houses' (*VP*, 391-92). Then Yeats goes on to describe his everyday encounters with these people before the rebellion. He certainly did not take them seriously and respectfully. Their conversation used to consist of 'polite meaningless words' and he might even later make jokes about them in his club: 'I have passed with a nod of the head / Or polite meaningless words, / Or have lingered awhile and said / Polite meaningless words, / And thought before I had done / Of a mocking tale or a gibe / To please a companion / Around the fire at the club,' (*VP*, 392) This suggests that, prior to the Rising, the poet regarded the middle-class rebels as insignificant and trivial. In the next two lines, 'Being certain that they and I / But lived where motley is worn', Yeats, according to MacDonald Emslie, employs 'theatrical imagery in order to suggest that Irish politics seemed a kind of clowning- and parading in Citizen Army and Volunteer uniforms



probably did appear somewhat comic at first'.<sup>32</sup> But however they had looked before within the poem, the participation of ordinary citizens in the events of the Easter Rising has drastically altered them: 'All changed, changed utterly: / A terrible beauty is born' (*VP*, 392). The oxymoron 'terrible beauty' suggests Yeats's double reaction to what has happened. On the one hand the sacrifice of the martyrs for their people is aestheticised; on the other hand it is seen as a profoundly disturbing act. Yeats is thus both attracted and appalled by the Rising.

'Easter 1916' has been the subject of intense critical debate. One group of critics has seen it as a poem which exalts self-sacrifice and violence. Richard Kearney, the co-editor of *The Crane Bag Journal of Irish Studies* holds that there have been two distinct and different attitudes in Irish literature, one inclined to mythologize and the other to demythologize Irish history and nationalism. While he names Joyce, Beckett, and Flann O'Brien among writers who tended to challenge the mythologizing trend, Yeats for him, certainly falls among those who had a mythologizing approach to Irish nationalism. The consequences of Yeats's approach and his influence have been far from fortunate and in fact lamentable as it inevitably led to normalization and praise of violence and self-sacrifice: 'Yeats offered the myth of Mother Ireland as symbolic compensation for the colonial calamities of history. The mythological motherland served as a goddess of sovereignty who, at least at the imaginary level, might restore a lost national identity by summoning her sons to the sacred rite of renewal through sacrifice'.<sup>33</sup> The actual manifestation of this myth was enacted in the Easter rebellion when Pearse and his fellow fighters sacrificed their lives for the Mother Ireland, and in 'Easter 1916', Kearney claims, Yeats approves of and praises the self-sacrifice of the martyrs:

In his poem, 'Easter 1916', Yeats admits that the rebel leaders whom he had previously dismissed in a 'mocking tale or gibe' have been 'transformed utterly' by the mythic rite of blood-sacrifice. The motley crew of disparate individuals have been metamorphosized into a visionary sect - 'Hearts with one purpose alone'. They have, in short, been redeemed from the contingencies of history and become magically contemporaneous with the mythic personages of the Holy Beginning. ... His (Yeats's) quarrel with Pearse in life is resolved in myth. They

find common cause outside of time. By means of the ritualistic repetition of blood-sacrifice, Pearse and his fellow signatories cease to be historical individuals opposed to the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, becoming one with it in the timeless tradition of 'dead generations'. This is why Yeats can ultimately embrace Pearse's myth of an 'enduring nation' revived by the ritual sacrifice of sons to the sovereign and indivisible motherland: 'For Padraig Pearse has said / That in every generation / Must Ireland's blood be shed'.<sup>34</sup>

In this reading, 'Easter 1916' is seen as a *rapprochement* between Yeats the nationalist poet and the revolutionaries. The unifying element here is a belief in a redemptive self-sacrifice and bloodshed which secures immortality for those who die for their motherland and this belief is shared by both the artist and the fighters. A similar critical point is Edward Larrissy's conviction that 'Yeats not only respected blood and heroism on ideological grounds, but simply recognized them as potent forces'.<sup>35</sup> Seamus Deane and before him Connor Cruise O'Brien had expressed rather same views as to the negative contribution of Yeats's works to the cult of blood sacrifice.<sup>36</sup>

Declan Kiberd's approach is revealing. He argues that Yeats's poem betrays a fight between his 'public, textual duty' and his 'personal urge' to cast doubt on the martyrs' sacrifice. Kiberd believes that 'Easter 1916':

speaks, correspondingly, with two voices, and sometimes enacts in single phrases ("terrible beauty") their contestation. The sanction for the first voice from bardic tradition was strong: but the force of the second was becoming more apparent to Yeats who increasingly defined freedom in terms of self-expression. He was abandoning the rather programmatic nationalism of his youth for a more personal version of Irish identity.<sup>37</sup>

While agreeing with Kiberd about the existence of this double voice in 'Easter 1916', I cannot accept his conclusion and the view of the above-mentioned critics when they read or to use Jonathan Allison's words, 'misread 'Easter 1916' as a celebration of blood sacrifice, ignoring its fundamental skepticism about the myth of redemptive force'.<sup>38</sup> What these critics ignore is the dialectical nature of this poem and the irresolution that is inherent within it. They only focus on one aspect of the poem and so interpret it as a celebration of violence, forgetting Yeats's doubts, qualifications and interrogation of violence.

On the other side, critics like Edna Longley and Augustine Martin who believe that 'Easter 1916' is just an interrogation of the revolutionary violence and not a celebration of it, fail to notice the commemorative side of the poem when Yeats honours the martyrs. Edna Longley, for example, emphasizes Yeats's direct and sharp criticism of the Easter revolutionaries, especially those he knew personally, MacBride and Markievicz. She quotes Yeats on Pearse before the Rising, 'Pearse is a dangerous man, he has the vertigo of self-sacrifice', and comes to the conclusion that 'Altogether, 'Easter 1916' seems as alien to Republican commemoration as Wilfred Owen to the ethos of the Cenotaph in London'.<sup>39</sup> Augustine Martin has rightly noted the development which took place in Yeats's attitudes towards Irish nationalism and revolution during the poet's long career. Thus, according to Martin, while *Cathleen ni Houlihan* presents a romantic and simple perspective of 'an Ireland redeemed by sanguinary sacrifice', 'Easter 1916', on the other hand, interrogates emphatically that naïve idea of revolution and what Martin calls as 'sanguinary nationalism'.<sup>40</sup> While I agree with Martin that Yeats's attitude towards Irish nationalism altered as he matured, to view *Cathleen ni Houlihan* as an outright and unquestioning support for blood-sacrifice and 'Easter 1916' as the opposite seems to underplay the complexities of a difficult situation.

My own reading is more in line with critics such as Gregory Castle, Jonathan Allison, and D.E.S. Maxwell. Castle argues that 'Easter 1916' betrays a 'lingering ambivalence' with respect to the sacrifice of the martyrs. Thus the poet's prevalent ambivalence consists of 'being caught between rebellion and criticism of the rebels, uncertain whether their sacrifice is a part of life's flow or an impediment to it'.<sup>41</sup> Jonathan Allison refutes Kearney's claim that Yeats's works attributes to what he calls the 'cultic immortalisation' of the Easter Rebellion and by extension to a basic belief in blood sacrifice within the contemporary IRA. Allison concludes that on the whole Yeats 'questioned, even as he affirmed that 'immortalisation' in 'Easter 1916''.<sup>42</sup> And finally Maxwell also refers to this inherent uncertainty and double view of the poem,

‘Yeats’s feelings about the violent rebellion against English rule had been divided-  
‘was it needless death after all?’’<sup>43</sup>

I believe that in ‘Easter 1916’ Yeats both identifies with and feels detached from the rebels, he is both attracted to and horrified by the nationalist sacrifice, celebrates and at the same time condemns the rebel leaders and their insurrection. All this uncovers his complex and uneasy relationship with the militant Irish nationalism. The coexistence of two opposite approaches is especially evident in the second stanza, when Yeats pays tribute to the dead leaders. The duality is clearly present here. The combination of approval and disapproval with regard to the self-sacrifice of the rebels is expressed in the same stanza. He commemorates Pearse and MacDonagh, describing them with respect and praise: ‘This man had kept a school / and rode our wingèd horse; / This other his helper and friend / Was coming into his force; / He might have won fame in the end, / So sensitive his nature seemed, / So daring and sweet his thought’. Even MacBride is included in the list of martyrs, though with reserved qualification due to his cruel treatment of Maud Gonne, ‘This other man I had dreamed / A drunken, vainglorious lout. / He had done most bitter wrong / To some who are near my heart, / Yet I number him in the song’ (*VP*, 392-93).

In spite of his reserved praise for the male rebels, Yeats cannot help deploring the nationalist extremism of the only woman leader of the Rebellion, Constance Markiewicz: ‘That woman’s days were spent / In ignorant good-will, / Her nights in argument / Until her voice grew shrill. / What voice more sweet than hers / When, young and beautiful, / She rode to harriers?’ (*VP*, 392) He regrets the aristocratic life that Constance Markiewicz had left to join the national cause, and laments the bygone days before she lost what Yeats portrays as her innocent sweetness to the shrill vulgarity of political activities. Yeats would later adopt the same castigating attitude towards the political activities of Markiewicz in ‘On a Political Prisoner’. The poet, portraying a scene when Lady Markiewicz is feeding a seagull from behind the bars of her prison cell, asks: ‘Did she in touching that lone wing / Recall the years before her mind / Became a bitter, an abstract thing, / Her thought some popular enmity: / Blind

and the leader of the blind / Drinking the foul ditch where they lie?' (*VP*, 397) Here Markiewicz's mind is portrayed as 'a bitter, an abstract thing'. Similarly in 'A Prayer for My Daughter' when the poet asserts his dreams and fears for his daughter, Maud Gonne is depicted as a dangerous example not to be emulated by the young girl. She is accused of having an 'opinionated mind' of which the poet certainly disapproves (*VP*, 405). 'Women, because the main event of their lives has been a giving of themselves, give themselves to an opinion as if [it] were some terrible stone doll', he wrote in his *Memoirs*, most probably having in mind rebellious women such as Markiewicz and Maud Gonne (*Mem*, 192). The use of negative adjectives such as 'bitter', 'abstract', 'ignorant, and 'shrill', in these poems remind us of the association between extreme female revolutionary nationalists, and the concepts of insanity, excess, terror and fixation in Yeats's works. There is to some extent a gender politics at work here, which reveals that Yeats had certain attitudes towards women who were involved in national struggle. When Maud Gonne was imprisoned in 1923 due to her political activities, Yeats wrote to Olivia Shakespear:

I cannot write any more as I have just learned that Maud Gonne has been arrested and I must write to Iseult and offer to help with the authorities in the matter of warm blankets. The day before her arrest she wrote to say that if I did not denounce the Government she renounced my society for ever. I am afraid my help in the matter of blankets, instead of her release (where I could do nothing), will not make her less resentful. She had to choose (perhaps all women must) between broomstick and distaff and she has chosen the broomstick-I mean the witches' hats (*L*, 697).

The extremism of Maud Gonne, and by extension, extreme nationalism, is mocked and belittled by associating it with 'broomsticks' and 'the witches' hats' which stands for witchcraft and so suggest fanaticism and lunacy. Ironically Yeats, in his treatment of revolutionary women of his time, is somehow subscribing to a trend in colonialist thinking which represent the colonized as savage, extremist, and insane.

In the last two stanzas the internal tension of the poet intensifies as he wavers between honouring the martyrs on the one hand, and criticizing and casting doubt on the necessity and plausibility of their sacrifice on the other. The penultimate stanza is

based on the imagery of change and stillness, 'Hearts with one purpose alone / Through summer and winter seem / Enchanted to a stone / To trouble the living stream' (VP, 393). The ambiguity of 'seem' suggests a sense of uncertainty and doubt on the part of the poet. Alasdair Macrae has interpreted these lines as Yeats's rejection of violence and at the same time his acceptance, however partial, that something is *gained* through violence. Macrae holds that Yeats is wrestling with a paradox: 'only a stone (the fanatic heart) can alter the flow of stream but to be a stone is to lose humaneness'.<sup>44</sup> But can the poet approve of the stone or is he repelled by it? 'Stone' is a symbol for immobility and 'stream' stands for change. By comparing the hearts of the rebels to a stone, Yeats is questioning and criticizing the dogmatism, the revolutionary fixity and the inability of the rebels to accommodate change. Moreover, this static and lifeless rock is contrasted with the image of 'stream', which implies a dynamic and constantly changing life. Helen Vendler asserts that, 'For all the 'vivid faces' of the patriots, their fixed focus on a single aim seemed to the poet repellent and unnatural'.<sup>45</sup> The dogged commitment of the nationalists to 'one purpose alone' has so entrapped them that they have become oblivious to the flow of life around them. The use of 'enchanted' hints at the absence of logic and common sense. Like the young Michael in *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, who was bewitched by Cathleen and lured away by her enticing words, forgetting his coming wedding and leaving his would be groom and his family for the sake of the national cause, the rebel leaders have renounced life and its beauties to sacrifice themselves for Mother Ireland. They seem to have turned a blind eye to the beauties and the movement of life: pictured in these lines:

The horse that comes from the road,  
The rider, the birds that range  
From cloud to tumbling cloud,  
Minute by minute they change;  
A shadow of cloud on the stream  
Changes minute by minute;  
A horse-hoof slides on the brim,  
And a horse plashes within it;  
The long-legged moor-hens dive,  
And hens to moor-cocks call;  
Minute by minute they live' (VP, 393).

The single-minded devotion of the revolutionaries and their stubborn commitment to one rigid and unyielding political objective is brought into question here. Yeats's disapproval of the extreme and fanatic intensity that turned the heart to stone is what he always thought of Maud Gonne's political activities. Time and again he had asked her to give up her nationalist endeavours and marry him. As an impassioned nationalist, Maud Gonne could never accept this dishonourable suggestion. In her old age she would remember how, 'Standing by the seashore in Normandy in September 1916 he read me that poem ['Easter 1916']; he had worked on it all the night before, and he implored me to forget the stone and its inner fire for the flashing, changing joy of life'.<sup>46</sup> Gonne's characteristic reply to Yeats's poem perhaps should have made him aware of the futility of his implorations:

My dear Willie

No I don't like your poem, it isn't worthy of you & above all it isn't worthy of the subject- Though it reflects your present state of mind perhaps, it isn't quite sincere enough for you who have studied philosophy & know something of history know quite well that sacrifice has never yet turned a heart to stone though it has immortalised many & through it alone mankind can rise to God- You recognise this in the line which was the original inspiration of your poem 'A terrible Beauty is born' but you let your present mood mar & confuse it till even some of the verses become unintelligible to many. ... There are beautiful lines in your poem, as there are in all you write but it is not a great WHOLE, a living thing which our race would treasure & repeat, such as a poet like you might have given to your nation & which would have avenged our material failure by its spiritual beauty.<sup>47</sup>

In the final stanza of the poem the duality of Yeats's reaction to the Easter insurrection intensifies. He begins by building on the imagery of the stone from the previous stanza. Disapproving of the long struggle of the nationalists which has turned their hearts to stone, Yeats wonders when all this bloodshed and self-sacrifice might come to an end: 'Too long a sacrifice / Can make a stone of the heart. / O when may it suffice? / That's heaven's part...' Then he goes on to mention his role as a poet or perhaps the role of the Irish people in general: '... our part / To murmur name upon name, / As a mother names her child / When sleep at last has come / On limbs that had run wild' (*VP*, 394). David Lloyd holds that Yeats's role as a nationalist poet was to identify with and represent the nation in its totality. The Easter Rising martyrs who

were now true representatives of the Irish people, Lloyd argues, dispossessed Yeats of this role. Therefore, the only remaining function for the poet was now merely to commemorate the rebels. However, the very act of commemoration, here enacted in the form of a lullaby, 'is clearly a redundant one: the obsessive repetition of the child's name after it is asleep no longer serves as a lullaby, but only asserts one's own anxious continuity with it in its virtual absence'.<sup>48</sup>

Some critics have suggested that 'Easter 1916' develops tropes derived from colonialist or imperialist texts. Declan Kiberd, for example has linked Yeats's imagery of a mother singing a lullaby to her children to the colonialist and imperialist discourses which look down on the colonized as immature adults who are in need of protection. He asserts that in comparing the dead heroes to children, Yeats 'may have unwittingly trivialized their gesture and have done this in a time-honoured colonialist way'. Kiberd then comes to the conclusion that 'Easter 1916', in spite of being 'the fundamental poem of the emerging Irish nation-state', is, in addition, 'in a perhaps inevitable sub-text, an imperialist's elegy for a headstrong but contained foe. In it, the Irishman is still a child'.<sup>49</sup> I think Kiberd is wrong here, in fact he is employing the familiar simplistic polarities or binaries of the colonialist/anti-colonialist discourses which tend to categorize the different sides of the colonial conflict in pre-set types. 'Easter 1916', on the other hand, tries to disturb the very alignments of such colonial and nationalist Manichaeian stereotypes. Kiberd's reading of the poem somehow ignores the sense of division and displacement which Yeats exhibits throughout this poem. His argument tries to trap Yeats in the very discourses the poem is problematizing. By using maternal imagery, Yeats tries to impart his closeness and a sense of affection for the dead nationalists. The murmuring tone implies the bewilderment and the deep absorption into which the Easter Rebellion has drawn the poet. He is in a sense so awe-struck by the unsettling resonances of the Rising that he can only murmur to himself. The use of 'wild' here, and 'bewildered' in the closing lines implies the uncontrolled and haphazard movement of the rebels, which has been unexpected and shocking to the outsiders. It also, as Helen Vendler points out: 'associates revolutionary activity with a confounding of reason by the enchanted



heart'.<sup>50</sup> But this does not necessarily mean that Yeats looks down at the rebels as immature children who have done something wrong, which is Kiberd's implication.

In the middle of the last stanza Yeats reveals his scepticism. Implying that England might have granted Home Rule at the end of World War I, he raises the tantalizing and up to now checked question, 'Was it needless death after all? / For England may keep faith / For all that is done and said. / We know their dream; enough / To know they dreamed and are dead;' (*VP*, 394) On the one hand the reference to 'needless death' and England's keeping faith reveals Yeats's anxiety, doubt, and uncertainty as to the necessity of the Rebellion; on the other hand, to know the dream of the dead heroes is to identify with them and their goals. Again this seems to be a combination of approval and disapproval. In his early poems 'dream' has been used frequently to suggest a consolation and a ray of hope, as in 'The Song of the Happy Shepherd', or to act as a call to the unknown and dark worlds, as in 'The Stolen Child'. Here it could imply both meanings, and if this is right then it would disclose the duality of Yeats's stance in relation to the Rising and its consequences. While in 'The Song of the Happy Shepherd' 'dream' does not lead to actions and the poet stresses 'words alone are certain good', the revolutionaries think otherwise (*VP*, 66). They might have died for a better world or their ideal world might just have been a futile dream. The poet is not certain. Then, once again, a questioning and doubtful Yeats cannot help wondering, 'And what if excess of love / Bewildered them till they died?' (*VP*, 394) The connotations of 'excess of love' and 'Bewildered' could suggest the lack of common sense and reason among the nationalists and hint at the poet's disapproval and also his own uncertainty about how to read these events. Disapproval is one possibility but it might seem quite an extreme one. It may be that 'Easter 1916' discloses ambivalence rather than full-scale approval or disapproval, and this is why it remains such a powerful poem. Richard Ellmann, quoting these two lines, rightly points out that in this memorable poem, Yeats 'celebrates the revolt of his compatriots but insists also on pointing out what seems to him to be its folly'.<sup>51</sup> However, in spite of all his reservations and interrogations, Yeats ends the poem commemoratively, 'I write it in a verse- / MacDonagh and MacBride / And Connolly and Pearse / Now and in time to

be, / Wherever green is worn, / Are changed, changed utterly: / A terrible beauty is born' (VP, 394). But this commemorative tone is unusual as it is somehow qualified and reserved by the oxymoron: 'terrible beauty'. Confirming the beauty of the self-sacrifice, Yeats cannot ignore the terrible side of it. Thus the last words of the poem and its refrain, and the poet's refusal of offering any easy conclusions exhibit his complicated reaction to the events of Easter Rising 1916. Before I conclude this section I would like to mention two quotations, one is David Pierce's account of Yeats's attitude towards Patrick Pearse in 1914. Pierce tells us:

When the Gaelic Society of Trinity College Dublin proposed in the autumn of 1914 to celebrate the birth of Thomas Davis, they invited to speak, as Representing the various currents of Irish intellectual life, Yeats, Pearse, and Thomas Kettle. J. P. Mahaffy the Provost took exception to Pearse being invited, and the meeting was moved to the Ancient Concert Rooms. Yeats defended Pearse's right to speak but made his position clear: He knew only vaguely what Mr Pearse had written about politics, but if it was some sort of anti-Englishism he was as vehemently opposed to the politics of Mr Pearse as he was to the Unionism of Dr Mahaffy.<sup>52</sup>

The second quotation is Richard Ellmann's insightful comment about 'Easter 1916'. Ellmann thinks that 'Easter 1916' 'has been castigated because it satisfied both the nationalists and the anti-nationalists, but Yeats, who had elements of both in his thought, expressed his whole position'.<sup>53</sup> What both of the above-mentioned remarks reveal, is in fact, I believe, a telling sign of Yeats's fragmented colonial identity. Moreover, they both point to his ambivalent status in the Irish colonial situation. Therefore, it would be rather reductive and naïve to define a complex and deeply divided colonial subject like Yeats as a reactionary colonialist or an anti-colonial revolutionary without paying attention to the constant fluctuations and diverse loyalties he went through all throughout his life. The presence of complexities of response to the Easter events and Yeats's mixed feelings towards the self-sacrifice of the martyrs is another indication of the hybridity of his colonial status.

## CONCLUSION

William Butler Yeats was involved in and commented on the political issues in his country, and in spite of his belief that literature should be purged from politics, a part of his literary work was affected by and affected Irish nationalism both during his life and after his death. Whether his views are interpreted as reactionary or revolutionary cannot be established once and for all, as we can find support for both views in his writings. The more important point remains that his views were conflicting and developing and his nationalism was always a deeply divided issue. In other words his involvement with the nationalist movement of his day was never easy or straightforward. A play like *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, it could be justifiably claimed, was at least indirectly responsible for sending some ardent nationalists into battle with British troops on Easter 1916, but its author's own view of the content and the message of that play has not been the same and straightforward, both at the time of its staging and afterwards. Likewise his well-known commemorative elegy 'Easter 1916' is more than merely celebrating and mourning the martyrs of that uprising and displays an equivocating tone towards the question of self-sacrifice. Yeats was very aware of the relation of his work to what was going on in the Ireland of his time, and he agonized over the effect of his writings on the consciousness of his compatriots. The poet's worries about his own possible complicity in the riots and unrests were a prevalent concern. 'I count the links in the chain of responsibility, run them across my fingers, and wonder if any link there is from my workshop' (*Au*, 368). In another instance and following the Easter Rising he anxiously confided to John Quinn: 'I keep going over the past in my mind and wondering if I could have done anything to turn those young men in some other direction'.<sup>54</sup> Even in his last years in 'The Man and the Echo' he wondered whether he was responsible for contributing in some way to the cult of sacrifice among Irish nationalists. It could be argued that some of his works led the 'young men' in a direction that he now regards with wonder. After all, in his youth he had admonished his fellow artists to kindle the national passion for freedom. He had emphasized that 'Irish singers, who are genuinely Irish in language, thought or

style must, whether they will or not, nourish the forces that make for the political liberties of Ireland' (*UP I*, 100).

After the Easter Rising, an article was published in the London *Daily Chronicle* on May 9, in which the question was asked, 'Has not this revolution in some sense a genesis in the Irish Theatre?'<sup>55</sup> The writer of that article probably had in mind, among other works of the Irish Theatre, *Cathleen ni Houlihan*. Years later, Connor Cruise O'Brien posed the same question more frankly: 'What was the difference between *Cathleen ni Houlihan* and the Rising of 1916? Can we say flatly that one is fiction and the other is real life?'<sup>56</sup> However, it is my view that Yeats's own relationship with the revolutionary nationalism of his time was never a straightforward or easy one. There were always doubts, questions, uncertainties, and most importantly attitudinal changes. If the young Yeats can be described as a revolutionary due to his political activities and his involvement in different nationalist committees, then in his middle years we have the picture of a reserved and bitter artist who is not happy at all with the emerging Catholic middle-class nationalism. The same man who rhetorically praises martyrdom in a speech made in 1904 – 'Sometimes in our Irish politics we have forgotten for a brief period the example of martyrs, and in the end we have always suffered for that forgetfulness. Sometimes we have become so absorbed in the politics of the hour, in the pursuit of some great political measure, that we have forgotten the more eternal and ideal elements of nationality' (*CW X*, 107) can sarcastically dismiss it in a letter written in 1922: 'Perhaps there is nothing so dangerous to a modern state, when politics take the place of theology, as a bunch of martyrs. A bunch of martyrs (1916) were the bomb and we are living in the explosion' (*L*, 690). There are contradictory statements and positions such as this that make it impossible to agree with a criticism which tries to portray Yeats once and for all as a reactionary with a colonial mentality or an anti-colonial activist.

Drawing on Lacanian psychoanalysis, postmodern notions of mimicry and performance, and Derridian deconstruction, Homi Bhabha has encouraged a rethinking of nationalism, representation, and resistance that above all stresses the 'ambivalence'

or 'hybridity' that characterizes the site of colonial contestation where cultural differences result in the constructions of ambivalent and hybrid cultural and national identities. By emphasizing concepts such as ambivalence and hybridity he argues that cultures, and by extension colonial identities, must be understood as complex intersections of multiple places, historical temporalities, and subject positions. In other words, Bhabha attempts to deconstruct the essentialist narratives of colonial identities. He believes that both the colonized and the colonizer are marked by ambivalence, which involves a process of identification and disavowal. The two distinct instincts of fear and desire inform the site of colonial encounter, and this mutual existence of the two opposite impulses leads to a splitting of the colonial discourse and colonial subject. 'Splitting' is a keyword in this argument. It means both the desire to remain the same and to be like another and has its origins in psychoanalytical discourse:

Splitting constitutes an intricate strategy of defence and differentiation in the colonial discourse. Two contradictory and independent attitudes inhabit the *same place*, one takes account of reality, the other is under the influence of instincts which detach the ego from reality. This results in the production of multiple and contradictory belief. The enunciatory moment of multiple belief is both a defence against the anxiety of difference, and itself *productive* of differentiations. Splitting is then a form of enunciatory, intellectual uncertainty and anxiety that stems from the fact that disavowal is not merely a principle of negation or elision; it is a strategy for articulating contradictory and coeval statements of belief.<sup>57</sup>

Writing elsewhere about the 'process of splitting and multiple/contradictory belief' of the colonized identity and drawing on Freud's essay on fetishism, Bhabha explains 'This process is best understood in terms of the articulation of multiple belief that Freud proposes in his essay on fetishism. It is a non-repressive form of knowledge that allows for the possibility of simultaneously embracing two contradictory beliefs'.<sup>58</sup>

I think this process is what occurs in Yeats's works discussed in this chapter. In other words Yeats's psychic uncertainty and his unresolved contradiction between aligning himself with, and distancing himself from the Irish revolutionaries is just an example of 'simultaneously embracing two contradictory beliefs'. In both *Cathleen ni Houlihan* and 'Easter 1916', he exhibits 'undecidability' between two contrary and opposite

impulses. The combination of identification with the revolutionary nationalists and disavowal of their actions are instances of 'Two contradictory and independent attitudes'. They exist side by side, though in varying degrees in 'the *same place*'. Although in the former work it seems that Yeats supports the idea of self-sacrifice in the service of the national cause more than he criticizes it, the interrogation of that sacrifice looms in the background. Even if the play is read as providing authorial support for anti-British mobilization in the name of Irish independence, it should be viewed as a short phase in his poetic evolution, and the development and change in Yeats's outlook toward the inflammatory message of *Cathleen ni Houlihan* cannot be ignored. In the years following its success, Yeats began to distance himself from the Irish nationalistic movement and, after the events of Easter 1916, a sense of questioning and unease over the contribution of his play to the violence appeared in his work. In the latter work, the uneasy and questioning side of Yeats is more strongly put forward while at the same time there are signs of identification with the revolutionary cause. Yeats's contradictory stances in these two works problematize binaries such as nationalist/unionist, colonizer/colonized. By portraying himself as questioning and divided, Yeats demonstrates more than ever the mood of a postcolonial artist for whom identity is never fixed, finished and resolved. In addition, the presence of internal tensions and confused loyalties in Yeats is a warning that his case cannot be resolved in terms of 'either/or'. It would be much more productive to look at it as a 'both/and' question. Rather than celebrating him as an anti-colonial artist or attacking him as a colonial reactionary, a postcolonial approach offers a more nuanced way of looking at Yeats. It would liberate our view of Yeats from pre-established patterns of identity. Finally it gives us an opportunity to probe into his complex and changing relationship with the revolutionary and anti-colonial nationalism of his time.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Edmund Wilson, 'W. B. Yeats', in *Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930* (London: Fontana, 1961), 28-57, 34, 35.

<sup>2</sup> R. F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life, I: The Apprentice Mage 1865-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), xxix.

<sup>3</sup> For example look at *W. B. Yeats, Essays and Introduction* (London: Macmillan, 1961), 519, when he gives voice to his inner contradictory impulse towards English: 'Then I remind myself that mine is the first English marriage I know of in the direct line, all my family names are English, and that I owe my soul to Shakespeare, to Spenser, and to Blake, perhaps to William Morris, and to the English language in which I think, speak, and write, everything I love has come to me through English; my hatred tortures me with love, my love with hate...'

<sup>4</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 149.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>6</sup> Alex Zwerdling, 'The Public Hero', in ed., David Pierce, *W.B. Yeats Critical Assessments*, vol. 3 (Mountfield, East Sussex: Helm Information, 2000), 102-22, 114.

<sup>7</sup> David Cairns and Shaun Richards, eds., *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 79.

<sup>8</sup> Deirdre Toomey, 'Moran's Collar: Yeats and Irish Ireland', in eds., Warwick Gould and Edna Longley, *Yeats Annual*, 12 (1996), 45-83, 66. D.E.S. Maxwell, Introduction to 'Irish Drama 1899-1929: The Abbey Theatre', in gen. ed., Seamus Deane, *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, vol. II (Derry: Field Day Publications, 1991), 562-68, 565. George Watson, 'W. B. Yeats: From 'Unity of Culture' to 'Anglo-Irish Solitude'', in *W.B. Yeats Critical Assessments*, vol. 3, 522-35, 522.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Maria Tymoczko, 'Amateur Political Theatricals, *Tableaux Vivants*, and *Cathleen ni Houlihan*', in ed., Warwick Gould, *Yeats Annual*, 10 (1993), 33-64, 38.

<sup>10</sup> P.S. O'Hegarty, 'W.B. Yeats and Revolutionary Ireland of His Time', in *W.B. Yeats Critical Assessments*, vol. 2, 292-94, 293.

<sup>11</sup> Maud Gonne, 'Yeats and Ireland', in *W.B. Yeats Critical Assessments*, vol. 2, 301-07, 306.

<sup>12</sup> Stephen Gwynn, *Irish Literature and Drama in the English Language: A Short History* (London: Nelson and sons, 1936), 158-59.

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<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Colin Smythe, ed., Gregory, *Seventy Years: Being the Autobiography of Lady Gregory* (Gerrards Cross: Smythe, 1974), 444.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Donald R. Pearce, ed., *The Senate Speeches of W.B. Yeats* (London: Faber and Faber 1960), 15.

<sup>15</sup> *The United Irishman*, 5 May 1902, quoted in full in eds., A. Norman Jeffares and A. S. Knowland, *A Commentary on the Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1975), 27.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Richard Ellmann, *The Identity of Yeats* (London: Faber & Faber, 1964), 295-96, notes.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Maria Tymoczko, 'Amateur Political Theatricals, *Tableaux Vivants*, and *Cathleen ni Houlihan*', in *Yeats Annual*, 10 (1993), 33-64, 58-59.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Alex Zwerdling, 'The Public Hero', in *W.B. Yeats Critical Assessments*, vol. 3, 102-22, 114.

<sup>19</sup> R.F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life, I: The Apprentice Mage 1865-1914*, 249.

<sup>20</sup> See for example David Cairns and Shaun Richards, 'What Do We Hope to Make of Ireland?' in *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 58-88. Patrick J. Keane, *Terrible Beauty: Yeats, Joyce, Ireland, and the Myth of the Devouring Female* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1988), Christopher Lockett, 'Terror and Rebirth: Cathleen ni Houlihan, from Yeats to The Crying Game', in *Literature Film Quarterly* (October, 2005), 290-305, Robert Tracy in a lecture given at Sligo in 1996 referred to in Brenda Maddox, *George's Ghosts, A New Life of W. B. Yeats* (London: Picador, 2000), 352. George Watson, 'W. B. Yeats: From 'Unity of Culture' to 'Anglo-Irish Solitude'' in *W.B. Yeats Critical Assessments*, vol. 3, 522-35. They all believe, in a way or the other that in *Cathleen ni Houlihan* Yeats propagated the myth of blood sacrifice and so was responsible for its dire consequences.

<sup>21</sup> John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 114.

<sup>22</sup> Carmel Jordan, *A Terrible Beauty, The Easter Rebellion and Yeats's "Great Tapestry"* (London: Bucknell University Press, 1987), 28.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>24</sup> Marjorie Elizabeth Howes, *Yeats's Nations: Gender, Class, and Irishness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 75.



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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>26</sup> Anna MacBride White and A. Norman Jeffares, eds., *Always Your Friend: The Donne–Yeats Letters, 1893-1938* (London: Pimlico, 1993), 150.

<sup>27</sup> Edward Larrissy, *W.B. Yeats* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1998), 30.

<sup>28</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 9.

<sup>29</sup> Gregory Castle, *Modernism and the Celtic Revival* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001), 87.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Stephen Coote, *W.B. Yeats: A Life* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1997), 376.

<sup>31</sup> Seamus Deane, ‘Yeats and the Idea of Revolution’, in *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature 1880- 1980* (London: Faber, 1987), 38-50, 46.

<sup>32</sup> MacDonald Emslie, ‘Gestures in Scorn of an Audience’, in eds., D.E.S. Maxwell and S.B. Bushrui, *W. B. Yeats 1865-1935 Centenary Essays on the Art of W.B. Yeats* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1965), 102-26, 102.

<sup>33</sup> Richard Kearney, *Postnationalist Ireland: Politics, Culture, Philosophy* (London: Routledge 1997), 113.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 114-115. See also his ‘Myth and Terror’, in ed., Jonathan Allison, *Yeats’s Political Identities: Selected Essays* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 165-79, when Kearney concludes that the nationalist ‘mythos of sacrifice’ has ‘its clearest formulation’ in Yeats’s poem about the Easter rising, 172.

<sup>35</sup> Larrissy, *W.B. Yeats*, 37.

<sup>36</sup> See Seamus Deane, *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature 1880- 1980* (London: Faber, 1985), and also his ‘Remembering the Irish Future’, in *Crane Bag*, 8:1, (1984), 81-92. See also Conor Cruise O’Brien, ‘Passion and Cunning: An Essay on the Politics of W. B. Yeats’, in eds., A. N. Jeffares and K. G. W. Cross, In *Excited Reverie: A Centenary tribute to William Butler Yeats 1865-1939* (London: Macmillan, 1965), 207-78.

<sup>37</sup> Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Vintage, 1996), 213.

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- <sup>38</sup> Jonathan Allison, 'The Attack on Yeats', in *W.B. Yeats Critical Assessments*, vol. 4, 421-32, 428.
- <sup>39</sup> Edna Longley, 'Helicon and ni Houlihan: *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*', in *Yeats's Political Identities: Selected Essays*, 203-20, 212. See also her *Poetry in the Wars*, (Newcastle-on-Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1986).
- <sup>40</sup> Augustine Martin, 'What Stalked through the Post Office? (Reply to Seamus Deane)', in *Yeats's Political Identities: Selected Essays*, 261- 78, 266, 269.
- <sup>41</sup> Castle, *Modernism and the Celtic Revival*, 87-8.
- <sup>42</sup> Jonathan Allison, 'The Attack on Yeats', in *W.B. Yeats Critical Assessments*, vol. 4, 421-32, 424.
- <sup>43</sup> D.E.S. Maxwell, 'Swift's Dark Grove: Yeats and the Anglo-Irish Tradition', in eds., D.E.S. Maxwell and S.B. Bushrui, *W.B. Yeats 1865-1935 Centenary Essays on the Art of W.B. Yeats*, 18-32, 21.
- <sup>44</sup> Alasdair D.F. Macrae, *W.B. Yeats: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), 77.
- <sup>45</sup> Helen Vendler, 'Four Elegies', in ed., A. Norman Jeffares, *Yeats, Sligo and Ireland: Essays to Mark the 21st Yeats International Summer School* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1980), 216-31, 217.
- <sup>46</sup> Stephen Gwynn, ed., *Scattering Branches: Tributes to the Memory of W.B. Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1940), 31-2.
- <sup>47</sup> Anna MacBride White and A. Norman Jeffares, eds., *Always Your Friend: The Donne-Yeats Letters 1893-1938*, 384-5.
- <sup>48</sup> David Lloyd, *Anomalous States, Irish Writing and the Post-colonial Moment* (Dublin: Lilliput, 1993), 70.
- <sup>49</sup> Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation*, 114.
- <sup>50</sup> Helen Vendler, 'Four Elegies', in ed., A. Norman Jeffares, *Yeats: Sligo and Ireland, Essays to Mark the 21st Yeats International Summer School*, 216-31, 219.
- <sup>51</sup> Ellmann, *The Identity of Yeats*, 143.
- <sup>52</sup> David Pierce, 'Yeats and Sligo', in *W.B. Yeats Critical Assessments*, vol. 4, 646-52, 650.

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<sup>53</sup> Ellmann, *The Identity of Yeats*, 144.

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Brenda Maddox, *George's Ghosts, A New Life of W. B. Yeats* (London: Picador, 2000), 46.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>56</sup> Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'An Unhealthy Intersection', in *New Review*, 2:16 (1975), 3-8.

<sup>57</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 132.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

## ANGLO-IRISH & CIVIL WAR AS 'SENSELESS TUMULT' BLAMING BOTH THE COLONIZER & THE COLONIZED

### INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of two consecutive wars, the Anglo-Irish war in 1919 and the Irish Civil War in 1922, had a deep impact on Yeats's poetry of the 1920s. His relationship with the issue of Irish nationalism, which was never easy and straightforward, underwent further changes by the occurrence of these two successive wars. The mixture of approval and disapproval, identification with and distance from Irish nationalist struggle, which was the prevalent mode of a poem like 'Easter 1916', gives way to a resigned acceptance of the futility of the nationalist utopian dreams in a poem like 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen', where we witness the poet reflecting on the naivety of his youthful ideals and lamenting the defeat of those cherished illusions: 'We too had many pretty toys when young: / A law indifferent to blame or praise, / .... / O what fine thought we had because we thought / That the worst rogues and rascals had died out' (VP, 428).

Living and writing in a (at least partially) postcolonial Ireland, Yeats endeavoured to reconcile his conflicting political and personal affiliations. This was reflected in his poetry of the time notably the poems in *The Tower*. After a brief review of the main themes of this collection, I will present a close reading of a double sequence in *The Tower*, the two key poems about two wars, 'Meditations in Time of Civil War', which portrays the poet's reflections on the Irish civil war, and 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen', which contains his thoughts on the Anglo-Irish war. In addition to describing the outside wars that these poems depict, they also imply an internal war which goes on in the speaker's psyche, a war between his different loyalties. In both these war poems, Yeats's position is to live in an in-between status, trying to mediate his vacillating attitudes which mirrored the ambiguity of his political loyalties. I will try to show how Yeats's outspoken response to the violence of Anglo-Irish and Irish Civil War in these poems attest his psychological tensions and his inability to decide what he finally thinks about the colonial and anti-colonial past of his country and its

postcolonial present. It will be argued that in both 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen' and 'Meditations in Time of Civil War' Yeats's refusal to endorse unquestioningly either side of the conflicts both in the Anglo-Irish war (colonizing England or colonized Ireland) and in the civil war (Republicans or Free State supporters), plus the fact that he was critical of both British and Irish attitudes toward each other in the course of these conflicts, reveals his heartfelt and ambivalent relationship and involvement with the Irish national resistance and British colonialism. Moreover, this refusal is an example of his dual or even multiple identities and his divided loyalties and allegiances. What we discover in these poetic reflections on history, politics, violence, and Ireland is the picture of a poet whose stance is far from taking sides with either side of the colonial struggle. It is rather the picture of a more complicated Yeats who betrays his profound uncertainty about the trend of Irish nationalism on the one hand and his resentment of British colonialism on the other.

I believe that these two poems are not just a series of reflections on the actual Anglo-Irish or civil wars taking place in Ireland, rather at a deeper level these poems betray Yeats's contradictory emotions, dual allegiances, uncertainties and finally his inability to ascertain his stance with regard to both conflicts. Seamus Heaney has expressed a similar view. Commenting on Yeats's poems which are about the actual political and nationalist upheavals, poems such as 'Easter 1916', 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen', and 'Meditations in Time of Civil War', Heaney asserts that in these poems Yeats 'did record direct responses to some events in Ireland ... but generally the poems did not arise from the immediate stimulus of happenings or from any desire to set down the story. They arose, rather, from the resonance that the happenings produced within his consciousness and from the meditations and disconsolateness they engendered there'.<sup>1</sup> Yeats's disillusionment with both the extravagant ideals and militant zeal of the nationalist Ireland and the colonial English policy of ruling Ireland exemplifies the diversity and instability of his political positions. After all, the existence of vivid tensions and opposing attitudes in Yeats's political thinking precludes applying an either/or approach to the poet's involvement with the question of (post)colonial Ireland. Rather it invites us, when applying a postcolonial reading to Yeats's work, to

foreground a basic and primary characteristic of postcolonial writings: that is, hybridity.

Two key elements in Bhabha's writing, when it comes to describing the colonial identities of both the colonizer and the colonized, are the concepts of ambivalence and hybridity. He focuses on the pluralization of colonial discourse and identity, emphasizing that the colonial subject is more characterized by change and flexibility than by fixity. That is why he hails Fanon's *Black Skins, White Masks* for disrupting the traditional dichotomous classification of the colonizer and the colonized: 'Black skin, white masks' is not, for example, a neat division; it is a doubling, dissembling image of being in at least two places at once. ... It is not the Colonialist Self or the Colonized Other, but the disturbing distance in-between that constitutes the figure of colonial otherness'.<sup>2</sup> Bhabha is not the only critic who has argued for the hybridity and ambivalence of colonial relationships. The Tunisian intellectual Albert Memmi, for example, has elaborated on the reciprocal and interdependent relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. Memmi's analysis of the intricate connection between both sides of the colonial divide, in his influential book *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, is highly relevant to a discussion about Yeats's colonial identity. Born in Tunisia, a Jew in a predominately Muslim country, Memmi had a similarity with Yeats, a Protestant Anglo-Irishman in a predominantly Catholic Ireland. Although dissimilar to most people of his own background, Memmi tried to identify with the colonized rather than the colonizer, and he was aware of the complex in-between cases of the colonized/colonizer Jews in Muslim Tunisia. He believed that the colonial relationship is not a one-sided association: rather it connects the two sides of the colonial conflict together in a mutual way. In his own terms: 'The colonial relationship which I had tried to define chained the colonizer and the colonized into an implacable dependence, molded their respective characters and dictated their conduct'.<sup>3</sup>

Both Bhabha's and Memmi's approach to the question of colonial relationships is relevant to Yeats and his poetry's engagement with this complex issue. Using these theoretical grounds, in what follows, I will argue that Yeats's troubled involvement with Irish nationalism and British colonialism, which stemmed from a complicated

array of allegiances and affiliations, led to a heterogeneity of voices in his work and contributed to the complexity of his political views.

### ***THE TOWER***

The main collection of Yeats's poetry in the third decade of the twentieth century, that is, 'The Tower', clearly reflects Yeats's central preoccupations of the time. It is a collection which Yeats composed mostly during an eight year period from 1920 to 1928. Some poems, or parts of some poems, however, were written earlier or later than this period.<sup>4</sup> These were crucial years in modern Irish history: the years of the Irish declaration of independence; the consequent Anglo-Irish war; the Anglo-Irish treaty which led to the emergence of Irish Free State; and the civil war between the Republicans who were demanding a fully independent Ireland, including the northern provinces on the one hand and the supporters of the new government who had accepted the Anglo-Irish treaty on the other. In general these years mark the turbulent and troubled passage of Ireland from a colony into a (partially) postcolonial country. Moreover, from a personal point of view these years were very significant for Yeats. In 1922 he was appointed a Senator of the Irish Free State and in the following year he won the Nobel Prize for Literature. In 1926, along with his wife and based on actual visions and séances they had, Yeats published *A Vision*, a philosophical book, which sets out to explain how human personality, life, civilizations and the universe work.

It was against this significant and eventful background in Yeats's life and in the history of Ireland that *The Tower* was published. It was and is considered by many critics as one of, if not the, best collection of Yeats's poetry. *The Tower* contained some of what in later years were to become Yeats's most known, and most anthologized poems, such as: 'Sailing to Byzantium,' 'The Tower', 'Meditations in Time of Civil War', 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen', 'Leda and the Swan,' and 'Among School Children'. As was always the case with Yeats's works, *The Tower* underwent numerous careful revisions. Even after the poet's death, this change in the order of the poems and the inclusion or deletion of some poems in the collection continued.<sup>5</sup> Since its first publication Yeats's book received a warm reception from

critics. M.L. Rosenthal calls it 'Yeats' finest single volume,' which 'ushered in the triumphant last decade of his career'.<sup>6</sup> His biographer, Joseph Hone, believes that Yeats 'wrote many great poems later, but in the volume *The Tower* (1928), which is dominated by 'Meditations', he reaches the peak of his endeavours in 'cold passion'.<sup>7</sup> Yeats himself was pleased about the book's success: '*Tower* is receiving great favour. Perhaps the reviewers know that [I] am ill, and think that I am so ill that I can be commended without future inconvenience...Even the Catholic Press is enthusiastic', he wrote to Lady Gregory (L, 740). In another letter to Olivia Shakespear he had the same thing to say: '*The Tower* is a great success, two thousand copies in the first month, much the largest sale I have ever had ...' (L, 742)

The poems of *The Tower* are characterized by hesitation, anxiety, doubt, uncertainty, conflict, and tension. Questions permeate the poems of this collection; the following are just a few examples: 'Does the imagination dwell the most / Upon a woman won or woman lost?' ('The Tower'); 'And what if my descendants lose the flower / Through natural declension of the soul, / Through too much business with the passing hour, / Through too much play, or marriage with a fool?' ('Meditations in Time of Civil War'); 'But is there any comfort to be found? / Man is in love and loves what vanishes, / What more is there to say?' ('Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen'); and 'Did she put on his knowledge with his power / Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?' ('Leda and Swan') (VP, 413, 423, 429, 441) Even in 'Among School Children' when Senator Yeats 'A sixty-year-old smiling public man' is supposed to be a wise, mature, and knowledgeable man providing answers, he is asking questions and trying desperately to find answers to them: 'O chestnut tree, great-rooted blossomer / Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?' (VP, 446) These are questions to which Yeats often does not provide a response.

Another characteristic of *The Tower* is the presence of polar themes. In fact throughout the collection the reader finds oppositional binaries, which preoccupied Yeats during the 1920s. Many poems are constructed around contradictory concepts, antinomies such as contemplation and action, mind and heart, art and politics, art and nature, birth and death, youth and old age, and so on. Yeats's musings over the



question of life and death, youth and old age, for example, appear time and again in different poems of *The Tower*. Poems as diverse as 'Sailing to Byzantium', 'The Tower', 'Youth and Age', 'The New Faces', 'A Prayer for My Son', 'Two Songs from a Play', 'Among School Children', 'Owen Aherne and his Dancers', and 'A Man Young and Old', all in one way or another mirror Yeats's reflections on this complex issue. Thus the conflict between senile old age and physical impotency on the one hand, and passionate youth and instinctive drives on the other, make up a main theme of poems such as 'Sailing to Byzantium' and 'The Tower'. The speaker of the first poem, which is the introductory poem of *The Tower*, bitterly and sadly complains: 'That is no country for old men. The young / In one another's arms, birds in the trees / -Those dying generations-at their song / The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,' (VP, 407) Likewise the second poem begins by introducing the theme of young mind and old body. Straight away we witness how the poet vents his rage at the paradoxical discrepancy between his physical and imaginative capabilities: 'What shall I do with this absurdity- / O heart, O troubled heart-this caricature, / Decrepit Age that has been tied to me / As to a dog's tail? / Never had I more / Excited, passionate, fantastical / Imagination...' (VP, 409) In 'The Wheel', the paradoxical interdependence of life and death is suggested by man's constant desire and wish for a future which in reality contains his end. The poem suggests that man's never-ending longing for newness ironically is a wish for his own annihilation: 'Through winter-time we call on spring, / And through the spring on summer call, / And when abounding hedges ring / Declare that winter's best of all; / And after that there's nothing good / Because the spring-time has not come- / Nor know that what disturbs our blood / Is but its longing for the tomb' (VP, 434).

The title and the content of a short poem in *The Tower*, 'Youth and Age', neatly summarize his concern with the passing of time: 'Much did I rage when young, / Being by the world oppressed, / But now with flattering tongue / It speeds the parting guest' (VP, 434). The next poem of the collection, 'The New Faces', which was addressed to Lady Gregory, once again betrays the speaker's preoccupation with death: 'If you, that have grown old, were the first dead, / Neither catalpa-tree nor

scented lime / Should hear my living feet, nor would I tread / Where we wrought that shall break the teeth of Time' (VP, 435). Although the poet's unexpressed concern with the approaching death is betrayed by the expression 'the teeth of Time', he tries to comfort himself and his friend with the consolation that even after they are dead, they are more real than the living: 'Let the new faces play what tricks they will / In the old rooms; night can outbalance day, / Our shadows rove the garden gravel still, / The living seem more shadowy than they' (VP, 435). Note the juxtaposition of opposite terms related to life and death in the poem, 'dead' and 'living', 'new' and 'old', 'night' and 'day'. Yeats is here building on the reversal of reality between life and death, a theme which he had already explored in his works. In 'Rosa Alchemica', for example, Robartes declares: 'There is Lear ... and he laughs because you thought yourself an existence who are but a shadow, and him a shadow who is an eternal god' (M, 275). In another instance and reflecting on Synge's death Yeats writes: 'It was as though we and the things about us died away from him and not he from us' (Au, 511). Finally in 'Among School Children' the sight of young, lively, and playful school children and a consciousness of his own sinking into senile old age startles the 'sixty-year-old smiling public man' into an unpleasant awareness of the inevitable fate of all human beings: age, ugliness and finally death. He thinks of his beloved, the beautiful Maud Gonne as a child standing before him, but this is just for a short moment as Yeats is suddenly reminded of the inescapable reality of her and his own present situation: 'Her present image floats into the mind- / Did Quattrocento finger fashion it / Hollow of cheek as though it drank the wind / And took a mess of shadows for its meat? / And I though never of Ledaean kind / Had pretty plumage once-enough of that,' (VP, 444).

Around the same time that he was expressing his enthusiasm over the success and the warm reception of *The Tower* to his friends, in separate letters to the same correspondents Yeats reveals his surprise at the 'bitterness' which is registered throughout the volume: 'Re-reading *The Tower* I was astonished at its bitterness, and long to live out of Ireland that I may find some new vintage. Yet that bitterness gave the book its power and it is the best book I have written. Perhaps if I was in better

health I should be content to be bitter' (*L*, 742). Writing from his holiday home in Italy to Lady Gregory, the same sentiment is articulated once again: 'This is an indescribably lovely place-some little Greek town one imagines-there is a passage in Keats describing just such a town. Here I shall put off the bitterness of Irish quarrels, and write my most amiable verses. They are already, though I dare not write, crowding my head. *The Tower* astonishes me by its bitterness' (*L*, 738). In fact bitterness is an important theme in many poems of *The Tower*. The very adjective 'bitter' appears times and again in different poems of the collection: 'Death and life were not / Till man made up the whole, / Made lock, stock and barrel / Out of his bitter soul,' ('The Tower'); 'Some violent bitter man, some powerful man / Called architect and artist in, that they, / Bitter and violent men, might rear in stone / The sweetness that all longed for night and day,' ('Meditations in Time of Civil War'); and, finally, 'All, all those gyres and cubes and midnight things / Are but a new expression of her body / Drunk with the bitter sweetness of her youth' ('The Gift of Harun Al-Rashid') (*VP*, 415, 418, 469).

But where does this bitterness come from and what is it exactly that Yeats is bitter about? It is partly a matter of the discrepancy the poet finds between his old physicality and young mentality. He is growing old bodily but his passions and emotions are gaining impetus and intensity as never before: 'What shall I do with this absurdity- / O heart, O troubled heart-this caricature, / Decrepit age that has been tied to me / As to a dog's tail? / Never had I more / Excited, passionate, fantastical / Imagination, nor an ear and eye / That more expected the impossible-', rages the speaker in 'The Tower' (*VP*, 409). From a broader perspective, the bitterness of the poet equates to the realization that everything valuable in man's life is transitory. Love, pleasure, art, glory, and power all last for only a brief period of time: 'Everything that man esteems / Endures a moment or a day. / Love's pleasure drives his love away, / The painter's brush consumes his dreams; / The herald's cry, the soldier's tread / Exhaust his glory and his might: / Whatever flames upon the night / Man's own resinous heart has fed' (*VP*, 438). This is a kind of philosophical bitterness, as B. L. Reid has rightly mentioned: 'Yeats had been bitter before and

would be bitter again; but *The Tower's* bitterness is ponderous and violent, it carries the size and pressure of philosophical premise'.<sup>8</sup> But there was another source for the bitter tone of the volume. When Yeats pointed out in his letters that 're-reading *The Tower* I was astonished at its bitterness, and long to live out of Ireland that I may find some new vintage', or 'here I shall put off the bitterness of Irish quarrels, and write my most amiable verses', he is hinting at that source (*L*, 742, 738). In other words, Ireland and his relationship to it. So in a local context, one cause of the poet's despair and bitterness goes back to the actual situation of Ireland at the time. To put it another way, he is bitter about what is going on around him. His shock and horror at the atrocities committed during the Anglo-Irish war by the notorious Black and Tans, the irregular British forces, is obvious: 'Now days are dragon-ridden, the nightmare / Rides upon sleep: a drunken soldiery / Can leave the mother, murdered at her door, / To crawl in her own blood, and go scot-free;' (*VP*, 429) However, he cannot help blaming Irish nationalists, including himself as well: 'We had fed the heart on fantasies, / The heart's grown brutal from the fare; / More substance in our enmities / Than in our love...' (*VP*, 425) Yeats's dissatisfaction with both sides of the colonial divide suggests his complicated and hybrid subject position, making him neither a paragon of anti-colonial struggle nor a defendant of colonial rule, in the poet's own terms as, 'Bound neither to Cause nor to State, / Neither to slaves that were spat on, / Nor to the tyrants that spat,' (*VP*, 414) Yeats, in short, seems to belong neither to the English colonizers nor to the Irish colonized.

#### **'MEDITATIONS IN TIME OF CIVIL WAR'**

This long poem consists of seven sections. Apart from the first and the last the remaining five parts use the possessive adjective 'my' in their titles. Thus the second section is called 'My House', and the following in order are: 'My Table', 'My Descendants', 'The Road at my Door', 'The Stare's Nest by my Window'. The first part of the poem is titled 'Ancestral Houses' and the last part carries a long title 'I see Phantoms of Hatred and of the Heart's Fullness and of the Coming Emptiness'. This repetitive use of and emphasis on the word 'my' in the titles suggest the speaker's

sense of marginalization and his aloofness from what is going around him. This feeling of alienation is later focused on in 'My House' when the poet compares himself with the original 'castaway' founder of the tower he is now residing in.

Before discussing the poem a brief account of the background to its composition is both necessary and helpful. Sinn Fein, the Republican Party which demanded separation from England, won the majority of the votes in the general election which was held in Ireland in 1918, and a national assembly was formed in January 1919. All this provoked the English government and as a result the eruption of a war between England and Ireland seemed inevitable. The War of Independence started in early 1919 and lasted until July 1921, a war characterized by brutality, sudden ambushes, and assassinations. The English forces consisted of irregular units, known as 'Black and Tans' and 'Auxiliaries', infamous for their violent and cruel reprisals such as the burning of whole villages and ferocious executions.<sup>9</sup> In December 1921 the two sides signed a treaty and agreed on the establishment of the Irish Free State which included twenty-six of the thirty-two Irish counties. Six of the nine counties of Ulster were left to form Northern Ireland, which was to remain within the United Kingdom. The partition of Ireland led to factionalism among the nationalists. While the moderates accepted the Anglo-Irish agreement, the more extremist republicans refused the voter-approved treaty and rejected the division of their country into two parts. A civil war seemed inevitable, a war between extreme elements of the Irish Republican Army and the newly founded army of the Irish Free State. The war was as brutal and ruthless as the Anglo-Irish war of independence and it finally ended with the victory of the Free State.<sup>10</sup>

Yeats had accepted the Anglo-Irish Treaty, but he refused to lend his support to either side of the conflict. On being asked whether he supported the Free State or the Republicans, he responded 'Oh, I support the gunmen-on both sides'.<sup>11</sup> His letter to Lady Gregory is characteristic of his undecided position:

I feel strongly against speaking or writing on the political situation at this moment. I will say nothing unless I find I have something to say which is quite

clearly my own thought. I will never take any position in life where I have to speak but half my mind & I feel that both sides are responsible for this whirlpool of hate. Besides only action counts or can count till there is some change.<sup>12</sup>

Being caught between two opposite sides of Irish nationalism was just one part of Yeats's dilemma. Another aspect of his divided loyalties was his allegiance to the Anglo-Irish tradition. Originally from England, but having lived for almost three hundred years in Ireland, the members of this minority tradition felt themselves as much Irish as English.

The Anglo-Irish were descendants and successors of the Protestant Ascendancy, who came to Ireland through the policy of plantations, which took place in different periods starting in the sixteenth century and ending in the time of Cromwell's rule over England. These Protestants, mostly the Anglican Church of Ireland, gained power under the Penal Laws, which deprived the native Irish Catholics of many civil rights, most importantly the ownership of land. Gradually a land-owning class of Anglo-Irish Protestants was created, ruling over the majority Irish Catholic tenants. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, with the formation of Henry Grattan's Patriot Party, this new class was in full control. They had their own government and they managed to gain limited independence from England. However, following an armed rebellion in 1798 by the United Irishmen, Protestant liberal elements who demanded more reforms, the British government intervened. The Irish rebellion was crushed and the Act of Union was enforced in 1801.<sup>13</sup> Over time, the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy lost their economic and political power, and in Yeats's youth their imminent downfall was quite obvious.

In the face of a growing population of Catholic middle-class Irishmen, who were seizing power in both economical and political terms, Yeats's idea of an ideal government for Ireland was based on the example of the eighteenth-century Grattan Parliament, which he claimed to be 'that one Irish century that escaped from darkness and confusion' (*EX*, 345). In a speech delivered in New York he voices this conviction:

... when we think of the whole history of Ireland for the last seven hundred years, there is perhaps only one epoch that we look upon with entire joy and pride-the ten or fifteen years after the declaration of the independence of the Irish Parliament... The nation was growing to greatness and it was precisely because it was so growing that England became afraid and decided to overthrow it.<sup>14</sup>

He believed that Ireland needed a powerful political leadership as well as a high-bred and lofty culture, which the Anglo-Irish tradition could provide. As he declared in his famous divorce speech in the Irish Senate: 'we are one of the great stokes of Europe. We are the people of Burke; we are the people of Grattan; we are the people of Swift, the people of Emmet, the people of Parnell. We have created the most of modern literature of this country. We have created the best of its political intelligence' (SS, 99). Here he is boasting of and identifying himself with this tradition. There were other attractions in the Anglo-Irish tradition as Yeats saw it, qualities such as free choice and solitude, which he attributed to this class. As both Donald Torchiana and Paul Scott Stanfield have pointed out, Yeats admired what he regarded as the free spirit of the aristocratic Anglo-Irish tradition. Torchiana believes that 'what attracted Yeats most in eighteenth-century Protestant Ireland was more an attitude or quality of intellect than any necessary class distinction. Whatever the provenance, the mind Yeats celebrated was like that of the Irish airman-capable of selfless, independent choice', and Stanfield states that Yeats's 'respect for aristocracy and his belief in the aristocratic temperament's ability to govern' was because of the freedom they enjoyed 'freedom from economic necessity... freedom from various everyday fears... the whole cumulative burden of small insecurities that created the hesitancy, defensiveness and perpetual embarrassment of the middle class temperament'.<sup>15</sup> This is the same freedom that Yeats proudly praises in poems such as 'The Tower' when the speaker glorifies 'The pride of people that were / Bound neither to Cause nor to State, / Neither to slaves that were spat on, / Nor to the tyrants that spat, / The people of Burke and Grattan / That gave, though free to refuse-', or in 'An Irish Airman Foresees his Death' when one of Yeats's ideal personification of the Anglo-Irish tradition, Robert Gregory faces his imminent death bravely 'I know that I shall meet

my fate / Somewhere among the clouds above; / ... / Nor law, nor duty bade me fight / Nor public men, nor cheering crowds,' (VP, 414, 328).

However, Yeats' relationship with the Anglo-Irish heritage was not a one-sided one of total approval. He was critical of their shortcomings and uneasy with their situation. A number of critics have pointed out the complex, contradictory, and double-sided nature of Yeats's relationship to his Anglo-Irish heritage. What most of these criticisms have in common is that while Yeats was attracted to this tradition and admired it, at the same time he was aware of its weaknesses.<sup>16</sup> Marjorie Howes has summarized Yeats's double attitudes very neatly. According to Howes on the one hand Yeats 'imagined the Anglo-Irish as a noble and worthwhile tradition, one capable of providing Ireland with the cultural continuity, political leadership and artistic integrity that he thought middle-class Catholic Ireland lacked' while on the other hand he 'imagined Anglo-Irishness as a nationality founded on crime, perpetually in crisis and inherently subject to degeneration and decay. Its essence lay in this combination of coherence and crisis'.<sup>17</sup>

'Meditations in Time of Civil War' reveals its speaker's engagement with two different traditions: the Anglo-Irish and the nationalist. This is a complex and uneasy engagement. It betrays Yeats's wishful praise of the bygone tradition of the Anglo-Irish, and it could be read as 'an implicit lamentation for an ideal colonial past in which tenant and Ascendancy landlord existed in harmony' or as a bitter and reflective criticism of Irish nationalism.<sup>18</sup> Cullingford, for example, notes that 'in 'Meditations' the poet who was once an ardent nationalist, a socialist in the tradition of William Morris, and an enthusiastic member of an occult secret society, now contemplates the brutality generated by the idealism of his youth'.<sup>19</sup> While I agree with Cullingford's views, my intention is to focus on Yeats's split colonial identity and his final uncertain commitments. These are central points not only of this poem, but also of a poem such as 'Leda and Swan', which has been read by several critics as depicting, among other interpretations, the colonial encounter between England and Ireland. Declan Kiberd, for example has argued for a postcolonial reading of the poem and 'the possibility of



interpreting the swan as the invading English occupier and the girl as a ravished Ireland'.<sup>20</sup> Edward Said ranks the poem 'among Yeats's greatest decolonizing works'.<sup>21</sup> But a reading of 'Leda and Swan' which has much in common with my own reading of the two poems I am discussing in this chapter is Janet Neigh's. In her elaborate essay 'Reading from the Drop: Poetics of Identification and Yeats's 'Leda and the Swan'' Neigh comments on the Yeats's complex attitudes towards Leda (the colonized, Ireland) and Swan (the colonizer, England). She notes 'the hybridity and merging of opposites' in the poem, and concludes that 'the politics advanced by the poem remain ambivalent due to its violence and its open-ended conclusion... the narrator gives no direction as to which character the reader should identify with'.<sup>22</sup>

My reading of 'Meditations in Time of Civil War' is in line with those of critics such as M. L. Rosenthal and Marjorie Howes. Rosenthal, for example, notes that Yeats's civil war sequence not only expresses a 'revulsion against the bloodshed, let alone the atrocities, of the civil war' but also reveals 'the admission of the psychological complexities accompanying that revulsion'.<sup>23</sup> Howes, in turn, remarks that although 'the title of the series suggests a meditation on the threat posed to the aristocracy by the violence of the civil war and the burning of estates, the series enacts a recognition of internal corruption and fragmentation'.<sup>24</sup> Yeats's meditations on the Irish civil war thus turn out to be at the same time meditations on an internal psychological war which is happening in his mind, a war in which he can identify with and at the same time feel detached from the opposing traditions of the unionist Anglo-Irish and Irish nationalists. This is why his final position in a war-torn Ireland is to inhabit a no-man's land 'a borderline space', one that is inhabited neither by the colonized Irish, nor by the colonizing English.<sup>25</sup>

The title of the poem gives us the impression that we will read Yeats's reflections on the civil war taking place around him. However, he begins by talking about the big old houses and their physical description. A number of critics have discussed Yeats's employment of geography, of place names and of land in his poetry.<sup>26</sup> What all these critics agree on is that in his early and mid-career poems Yeats celebrated and focused

on Irish landscape in order to make an Irish identity for himself, to make his art rooted in Irish soil, and finally and most importantly to prove his patriotism and anti-colonial attitude. As Jahan Ramzani has put it: ‘in Yeats’s poetry they (place names) are often obvious signifiers of native ground – Drumahair, Scanavin, Lugnagall, and Mocharabuiee. Through acts of poetic imagination, Yeats seeks – as emphasized by Deane, Said, Kiberd, and George Bornstein – to reclaim a land violently possessed by the British’.<sup>27</sup> But while in his early poetry Yeats’s use of Irish locales such as Sligo indicated his anticolonial aspirations, in his later poems a preoccupation with the Big Houses of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy, which were traditionally associated with the English occupiers of Ireland, could be a sign of his estrangement from Irish nationalism. A number of his memorable poems such as ‘Upon a House Shaken by the Land Agitation’, ‘Coole and Ballylee, 1931’, and ‘Coole Park, 1929’ are actually a celebration of the culture these houses stand for. These poems show the physical description of the aristocratic houses, their inhabitants, traditions and customs. These big houses were owned by upper-class Protestant landowners such as Lady Gregory in whose house Yeats had spent many pleasant summers. Yeats’s background was middle-class, but he very much liked to associate himself with aristocracy, especially from his mid-career to the last years of his life. As R.L Reid has pointed out, ‘by 1914, the date of *Responsibilities*, Yeats’s idealism had soured and hardened, his social sympathies had turned aristocratic, his political sympathies conservative; he had lost almost all faith in the mass of the Irish people: ‘weasels fighting in a hole,’ he would call them in ‘Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen’’.<sup>28</sup> Therefore the choice of the title ‘Ancestral Houses’ for the first part of ‘Meditations in Time of Civil War’ could be seen as an effort on his side to associate himself with the aristocratic tradition. As early as 1909 he could voice his attraction towards aristocracy and the ideas of class: ‘In spite of myself my mind dwells more and more on ideas of class. Ireland has grown sterile, because power has passed to men who lack the training which requires a certain amount of wealth to ensure continuity from generation to generation, and to free the mind in part from other tasks’ (*Mem*, 178). Note, however, that the phrase ‘in spite of myself’ points to an internal tension and doubt in Yeats’s thought. A major

motif of the poem is Yeats's interest in and celebration of the Anglo-Irish tradition, a tradition which according to Stanfield 'had seemed alien to the nationalists'.<sup>29</sup>

The first stanza seems to suggest the richness and abundance of life in the big house: 'Surely among a rich man's flowering lawns, / Amid the rustle of his planted hills, / Life overflows without ambitious pains; / And rains down life until the basin spills, / And mounts more dizzy high the more it rains' (*VP*, 417). The important point here is not just the wealth of such figures, but the accompanying freedom that wealth can bring to the life of the Anglo-Irish landowners, the independence it offers them, 'As though to choose whatever shape it wills / And never stoop to a mechanical / Or servile shape, at other's beck and call' (*VP*, 417). For Yeats 'mechanical / Or servile' are characteristics of the present Ireland, thus the last lines imply a comparison, contrasting the freedom of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy to choose whatever they like, with the 'servile' and 'mechanical' obedience of those who just follow 'other's beck and call', apparently the fighting nationalists. But the use of words such as 'overflows' and 'dizzy' refers implicitly to the speaker's heart-felt and internal anxieties about the Anglo-Irish colonial past. As Vincent Adams has noted there is a sense of destructiveness implied by the first lines of 'Ancestral Houses': 'Life overflows without ambitious pains; / And rains down life until the basin spills, / And mounts more dizzy high the more it rains'. According to Adams, these lines suggest that 'too much 'life' can get destructive when it is no longer contained (or channeled) properly ... and it is here that a reader connects the water spilling out of the basin to the violence of the war'.<sup>30</sup> The source of the chaotic present could be traced back to the excesses of a colonial past.

The certainty of the poet's belief in the grandeur of the Anglo-Irish tradition expressed by that 'Surely' in the first stanza is questioned by the first words of the second stanza, 'Mere dreams', which are repeated twice. He then goes on to compare and contrast past and present by employing two images. The fountain image, 'the abounding glittering jet' of a seemingly aristocratic glamour, is replaced or is rather threatened by the barren image of a war-torn Ireland represented by 'some marvellous empty sea-

shell'. Rob Doggett tells us how during the civil war both Republicans and the Free State supporters laid claim to the grand rhetoric of nationalism:

Not surprisingly, both groups adopted the rhetoric of pre-independence nationalism, though with different ends in mind. While Free State supporters tended to promote the treaty as the climactic moment in a centuries-old struggle, an ultimate validation of the heroic actions undertaken by previous generations, Republicans characterized it as a fundamental betrayal, "a surrender," according to Republican leader Eamon De Valera, "of the ideals for which the sacrifices of the past few years were deliberately made and the sufferings of these years consciously endured".<sup>31</sup>

However enticing and appealing their rhetoric might have seemed to their supporters, the inevitable end of their claims turned out to be death not life, just like the image Yeats uses here, a sea-shell that looks marvellous from outside but is empty inside, carrying death not life. Doggett asserts that Yeats oscillates 'between a past in which violence leads to greatness and a present in which violence yields only further violence', and this is evident in the first lines of 'Ancestral Houses'.<sup>32</sup>

There is, however, another way of interpreting the images of this stanza if 'empty sea-shell' and 'fountain' are both taken to symbolize the present and the past of the Anglo-Irish. Alex Zwerdling has read these two symbols as representing Yeats's two different attitudes towards the Anglo-Irish aristocracy. According to Zwerdling:

The fountain with its eternal vitality, its perpetually self-reserving abundance, mirrors Yeats's earlier, optimistic hopes for the class. But the sea-shell, though it is precious and beautiful, is empty and dead ... a museum piece ejected by the stream of life and cut off from the source of vitality. This view of the modern aristocracy gradually begins to prevail in Yeats's later poetry.<sup>33</sup>

In this reading the poem is not all praise for the aristocratic and glorious tradition of the Anglo-Irish or a condemnation of the frenzied and chaotic myth of the nationalists. We can even say that the poem suggests a connection and continuity between the violence of colonial rule and the destructiveness of anti-colonial struggle. The source of present calamities could then be traced back to the past injustice of colonial domination. This complicates Yeats's position towards both the Anglo-Irish

aristocracy and Irish nationalism. He is criticising the present civil war between different factions of nationalists, which has resulted in chaos but this does not necessarily imply that the poem approves and identifies wholeheartedly with the colonial Anglo-Irish tradition. Yeats's attraction to the cherished aristocratic values of the Anglo-Irish is mixed with his awareness of the role they have played in bringing about the present atrocities. Richard Gill has thus rightly pointed out the ambivalence that characterizes 'Ancestral Houses', which he calls an 'ambiguous compound of eulogy and satire'.<sup>34</sup> This 'eulogy and satire' as Gill has argued, is here expressed towards the colonial Anglo-Irish tradition. Yet throughout the poem as a whole 'eulogy and satire' are Yeats's characteristic attitudes, directed towards all sides involved in the colonial situation of Ireland.

Starting from the third stanza the theme of degeneration is introduced, again by a comparison made between past and present occupants of the big house, or, in a bigger picture, between the past generation of the Protestant Ascendancy and their present descendants:

Some violent bitter man, some powerful man  
Called architect and artist in, that they,  
Bitter and violent men, might rear in stone  
The sweetness that all longed for night and day,  
The gentleness none there had ever known;  
But when the master's buried mice can play,  
And maybe the great-grandson of that house,  
For all its bronze and marble,'s but a mouse (VP, 418).

Ironically, sweetness and the gentleness have been created by bitter and violent men. However, in sharp contrast to the power of the founders of the house, their descendants are depicted contemptuously as weak rodents, as 'mice' who are unable to maintain the high cultural legacies of their fathers. Thus the closing stanzas turn into long rhetorical questions in which the speaker articulates his doubts as to the possibility that the glorious Anglo-Irish past tradition could be revived by the weak inheritors of that culture: 'O what if gardens where the peacock strays / with delicate feet upon old traces, / ... / But take our greatness with our violence? / What if the glory

of escutcheoned doors, / And buildings that a haughtier age designed, / ... / But take our greatness with our bitterness?' (VP, 418) Yet the possibility of reading 'take' either as 'take away' or 'take on', and also the adjoining of 'greatness' with 'bitterness' and 'violence', make Yeats's adoration of and sympathy to the Anglo-Irish past both ambivalent and complex. Thus the final two stanzas could be read as either a lament for the passing aristocratic tradition, which as a consequence has diminished Irish greatness with its disappearance, or as an interrogation of a forced tradition which has contributed to the present civil war violence. Besides, even if Yeats is celebrating the past Anglo-Irish tradition, he is looking down at the present critical political situation and is observing with contempt the weak inheritors of that strong tradition. So we see a tension between the poet's admiration for and disquiet at Anglo-Irish heritage. As Stan Smith has argued, in Yeats's late poems such as 'Coole Park, 1929' and 'Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931', the country houses of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy represent an 'ambiguous inheritance'. Smith asserts that 'Ancestral Houses' neatly sums up this ambivalence:

The poem tells us they (the houses) were built by 'Some violent bitter man, some powerful man' who 'Called architect and artist in, that they, /Bitter and violent men, might rear in stone / The sweetness that all longed for night and day /The gentleness none there had ever known.' They represent for him a culture and gentility emerging from but untainted by that world of violence. It may be in the end, however, that such monuments to graciousness simply 'take our greatness with our violence'. They are not really free from it. The house is not necessarily a symbol of security. It can, for example, be the Gothic mansion inhabited by dark forces.<sup>35</sup>

The second part of 'Meditations in Time of Civil War', 'My House' begins with a description of the poet's residence, Thoor Ballylee, a Norman stone tower in Co. Galway, which Yeats purchased in 1917. A number of critics have pointed to the very ambiguous doubleness which Yeats's use of the tower as a symbol and a residence imparts. Edward Larrissy believes that Yeats's '*The Tower* is a volume which is steeped in ambivalence towards Ireland, more precisely towards what Ireland was making of itself... He is bitter and Ireland is bitter. The very emblem of the Tower is suggestive of an ambivalence'.<sup>36</sup> Likewise Rob Doggett, in turn, refers to the hybridity of the tower as an image, which according to Doggett is 'derived in typical Yeats

fashion from British literary culture (*'Il Penseroso's* Platonist toiled on / In some like chamber') and Irish local culture'.<sup>37</sup> As Doggett's quotation from the poem shows, Yeats's debt to the English literary tradition is obvious. However, Yeats attempts somehow to preserve a continuity and a commingling between the culture of the British Empire and that of Ireland, to localize his borrowed symbol and to graft it onto the Irish soil: 'I like to think of that building as a permanent symbol of my work plainly visible to the passer-by. As you know, all my art theories depend upon just this-rooting of mythology in earth'.<sup>38</sup> Yeats's confession to T. S. Moore seems to chime with John Mcleod's assertion that 'Community, belonging, a sense of rootedness in the land, home – each is relevant to the construction and purpose of nationalist representations'.<sup>39</sup> Ironically, however, Yeats's claim on Irish soil and his tower has been made at the expense of its original Irish inhabitants. Had the original owners of the tower not been removed from their land by the occupying Norman soldiers, he could not have resided there. In historical fact, Thoor Ballylee, the tower where the poet was living and reflecting on the turbulent events besieging his war-affected country, and the image he had chosen as one of his main symbols, had originally been a Norman fortress, a stronghold of the invading English troops who came to occupy and colonize Ireland.

In the beginning lines of 'My House', the speaker is describing his house and its surroundings. He then continues with a comparison between himself and the Norman founder of the tower: 'An ancient bridge, and a more ancient tower, / A farmhouse that is sheltered by its wall, / An acre of stony ground, / Where the symbolic rose can break in flower, / Old ragged elms, old thorns innumerable,' (VP, 419). By using 'ancient' to describe the tower, Yeats is emphasizing the rootedness of the Anglo-Irish tradition he belongs to in Ireland. He was always conscious about his mixed background and was quick to come to its defence, claiming Protestants as Irish, as the other inhabitants of Ireland. In his introduction to *The Words upon the Window-Pane*, for example, he refers to the origin of the Protestants who came to Ireland and notes that 'some of whom neither called themselves English nor looked with contempt or dread upon conquered Ireland'. Then in a footnote he adds:

Nor were they English: the newest arrivals soon inter-married with an older stock, and that older stock had intermarried again and again with Gaelic Ireland. ... The family of Yeats, never more than small gentry, arrived, if I can trust the only man among us who may have seen the family tree before it was burnt by Canadian Indians, 'about the time of Henry VII'. Ireland, divided in religion and politics, is as much one race as any modern country (*EX*, 347).

When he called his tower Thoor Ballylee, Yeats wrote to Mrs. Shakespear: 'What do you think of our new address - Thoor Ballylee? Thoor is Irish for a tower and it will keep people from suspecting us of modern Gothic and a deer park'.<sup>40</sup> Even in naming his residence, the poet was conscious to emphasize his Irishness. As late as 1935 in a radio broadcast when the presenter uses the word Anglo-Irish in a question, he does not hesitate to retort sharply:

But I hate all hyphenated words. Anglo-Ireland is your word, not mine. *Oh but I am only talking to make you talk.* All right, but henceforth I shall say the Irish Race. The pure Englishman came to Ireland under Cromwell and married into the mixed Irish race. The pure Gael from the Blasket Islands comes to Dublin and goes into the civil services; he will marry into that race in his turn. The Irish people are as much a unity as the German, French, or English people, though many strands have gone to the making of it, and any man who says that we are not talks mischievous nonsense (*CW X*, 257-58).

'The symbolic rose' of the fourth line has been Yeats's recurrent symbol for Ireland beginning as early as 1890s with 'To the Rose upon the Rood of Time', where the '*Red rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days!*' had inspired the poet to sing of the ancient Irish heroes' battles, up to 1920s with 'The Rose Tree', where the nationalist martyrs Pearse and Connolly heroically and tragically declare that 'There's nothing but our own red blood / Can make a right Rose Tree' (*VP*, 100, 396). But now it seems that Yeats's position with regard to the rose, symbol of Ireland, and the heirs of Pearse and Connolly, the fighters for Irish freedom, has changed. The rose is described as 'old' and it is associated with 'innumerable thorns'. As Rob Dogget has aptly pointed out, the use of these words suggests Yeats's questioning of the nationalist tradition 'in which violent death has led to a sterile cycle of further violence'.<sup>41</sup>



This change from a youthful idealism to old-age detachment had not occurred overnight but gradually. Before the actual troubles began Yeats had expressed his disapproval of militant Irish nationalism. In a 1918 letter to Clement Shorter he had confided:

...times are too dangerous for me to encourage men to risks I am not prepared to share or approve. If the Government go on with conscription there may be soon disastrous outbreaks-I doubt the priests and the leaders being able to keep the wild bloods to passive resistance. I have seen a good many people here in the West and I cannot imagine a more dangerous condition of things, the old historical passion is at its greatest intensity. I hear of an old cabinet maker saying two years ago 'There will be more wild work. The young men are mad jealous of their leaders for being shot' (*L*, 649).

The revival of 'the old historical passion' he mentions in his letter led him to imply publicly what he had already stressed privately, namely that he was distancing himself from the idea of nationalist self-sacrifice and martyrdom. Like a 'stilted water-hen / ... / Scared by the splashing of a dozen cows;' Yeats is becoming alienated from what is going on around him, and is finding himself increasingly unable to identify with either side of the nationalist divide (*VP*, 419). Taking refuge in his lonely tower, he tries to find solace in finding similarities between himself and the Norman founder of the tower:

Two men have founded here. A man-at-arms  
Gathered a score of horse and spent his days  
In this tumultuous spot,  
Where through long wars and sudden night alarms  
His dwindling score and he seemed castaways  
Forgetting and forgot;  
And I, that after me  
My bodily heirs may find,  
To exalt a lonely mind,  
Befitting emblems of adversity (*VP*, 420).

Both the soldier who founded the tower and the artist who rebuilt it have experienced the hardships of turbulent times. Both have felt a sense of marginalization and alienation from their society. But while the Norman soldier had been a man of action who 'Gathered a score of horse and spent his days / In this tumultuous spot,' the

Anglo-Irish poet is a man of contemplation who, in order to 'exalt a lonely mind,' has been content with 'Befitting emblems of adversity'. Thus the theme of the man of action versus the man of contemplation, which was implicitly introduced by the image of 'The stilted water-hen / ... / Scared by the splashing of a dozen cows;' now enters the poem more emphatically.

In 'My Table' the poet explores one of the 'befitting emblems of adversity', which had been presented to him by an upper-class Japanese: 'Sato's gift. Swords are traditionally associated with war and conflict but here Yeats, the poet, looks at Sato's sword as 'a changeless work of art. / ... / A marvellous accomplishment, / In painting or in poetry, ' (VP, 421) Yet the sword now lies on Yeats's table side by side with pen and paper, the instrument of war lying beside the instruments of art and poetry. Its presence there 'may moralise' the poet's 'days out of their aimlessness' (VP, 421). The duality and tension between action and contemplation is quite evident here. The poet is openly staging a kind of dialogue between conflicting loyalties and inclinations in his mind. At the same time that he is criticising the nationalist fighters on both side of the conflict one part of him is longing to take sides and act. David Lloyd has discussed the interrelationship between national poetry and national violence in Ireland, concluding that with the occurrence of the Easter rising in 1916 Yeats deeply felt 'his marginalization as a poet of cultural nationalism' as well as his 'own loss of any sense of organic connection with the nation that was founded by Easter 1916'.<sup>42</sup> At the time of the civil war Lloyd's view seems to be particularly relevant. Unable actively to take part in the national conflict because of uncertain loyalties, the poet tries to find solace and take refuge in the aesthetic realm of his art.

The fourth part of the sequence, 'My Descendants', as its title implies, includes the poet's speculations about his children and their future. The opening lines remind us of the introductory lines of *Responsibilities*, where Yeats had boasted about the purity of his ancestors' blood ('*That has not passed through any huckster's loin,*' (VP, 269)) an implicit note of his preoccupation with race and proper breeding, which would be given full expression years later in his miscellaneous treatise on eugenics, *On the*

*Boiler*, and the shocking short play, *Purgatory*. There Yeats asked for forgiveness from his 'old fathers' for not having a child. By 1923 he had married and had two children, a daughter and a son, yet he is anxious about them:

Having inherited a vigorous mind  
From my old fathers, I must nourish dreams  
And leave a woman and a man behind  
As vigorous of mind, and yet it seems  
Life scarce can cast a fragrance on the wind,  
Scarce spread a glory to the morning beams,  
But the torn petals strew the garden plot;  
And there's but common greenness after that' (*VP*, 422).

The first line shows the same eugenic mindset apparent in the opening lines of *Responsibilities*. The speaker who has 'inherited a vigorous mind' from his ancestors hopes to pass it to his children, leaving 'a woman and man behind / As vigorous of mind'. However, the present situation threatens the fulfilment of his dreams: 'and yet it seems / Life scarce can cast a fragrance on the wind, / Scarce spread a glory to the morning beams,' This is a bleak view of the time the poet is living in: there is no glory and hope in the present. Both the Republicans and the Free State supporters who are involved in the civil war are hoping to fulfil their different ideas of a free and post-colonial Ireland, they are fighting for what they consider to be their yet-to-be nation. The speaker of these lines, however, seems to be indifferent to either side's aspirations. His priority seems to be more private, to preserve a pure familial rather than national dynasty. The last line of this stanza implies Yeats's aloofness and even his contempt for the nationalist struggle: 'But the torn petals strew the garden plot; / And there's but common greenness after that'. The torn petals are reminders of 'the symbolic rose', Ireland and those who are being killed in the civil war. The Irish nationalists are killed on both sides but their deaths do not bring about beauty, not even the 'terrible beauty' of the Easter Rising, when Yeats had prophesized, somewhat supportively, 'Now and in time to be, / Wherever green is worn, / Are changed, changed utterly: / A terrible beauty is born' (*VP*, 394). Now the only legacy which has remained is 'common greenness'. Green, the Irish nationalist colour, is associated with commonness suggesting the poet's scorn as when he had described indignantly

and contemptuously King Edward's VII succession to the British crown, and the Unionist celebrations in Dublin in honour of his coronation: 'Tara uprooted, and new commonness / Upon the throne and crying about the streets' (*VP*, 198).

Antony Coleman has argued that in 'Meditations in Time of Civil War' Yeats shows his admiration for past Anglo-Irish values and that he thus celebrates 'the value of heroic life, passionate, sensuous, aristocratic living. What he dismisses are the legitimate felt certitudes of others now engaged in a civil war to establish their own validity'. Coleman concludes that this points to Yeats's 'failure to be an Irish, a popular poet: unlike the Gaelic poets of the eighteenth century, he does not express his feelings in the idiom of national events – his mode of consciousness being English, he ignores significant implications in the Irish experience, an experience the stated subject of his meditations, 'Time of Civil War''.<sup>43</sup> In my view this is true only to a degree. Firstly Yeats is not just praising the Anglo-Irish tradition wholeheartedly, as I have tried to show, and secondly, as the next part of the poem suggests, he harbours sympathies for the fighting nationalists. His attitude towards the two traditions, the colonial Anglo-Irish and the anti-/post-colonial nationalist, is neither one of approval or disapproval, but rather one that contains a complex mixture of both. His final stance in this poem suggests a lack of resolution. To which side does Yeats's allegiance belong? The poem offers no final or conclusive answer to this vexed and difficult question.

Up to the fifth part of 'Meditations in Time of Civil War', the poet has been meditating on the Anglo-Irish past, his own dwelling, his descendants and their future. From this part up to the end of the sequence his meditations turn on the war itself and those who are fighting it. In 'The Road to my Door' the war has finally come to the poet's door and he begins to confront the physical reality of what is actually happening around him. First we have his encounter with soldiers from the opposite camps: 'An affable Irregular, / A heavily-built Falstaffian man, / Comes cracking jokes of civil war / As though to die by gunshot were / The finest play under the sun' (*VP*, 423-24). Irregulars were the members of the Irish Republican Army whose

opposition to the Anglo-Irish treaty signed by the Free State kindled the flames of the Civil War. Yeats's description of the Republican soldier is interesting: he is 'affable', kind, good-natured and sociable, and he seems careless about war, cracking jokes about it ('As though to die by gunshot were/ the finest play under the sun.') Ironically, the IRA soldier who is fighting for total independence from England is compared to a character in England's greatest poet's works. He is portrayed as Sir John Falstaff, Shakespeare's most famous comic character, the fat, humorous, and boastful knight of the first and second parts of *Henry IV* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. This and the reference to 'play' in the last line of the stanza suggest that civil war is looked upon by Yeats as a play, a comic play perhaps but with a tragic outcome. According to Rob Doggett the 'reference to Falstaff evokes the braggart soldier, Shakespeare's comic antihero, yet the tone falls somewhat short of outright condemnation, expressing rather a curious mixture of tragedy and farce'.<sup>44</sup> The word 'play' has already been used in 'My Descendants' when the speaker was weary that his children might 'lose the flower', their country, their heritage, or the purity of their race: 'Through too much business with the passing hour, / Through too much play, or marriage with a fool?' (VP, 423) In that context the poet's disapproval of the 'play', the cause of extreme nationalism is implied by expressing his dissatisfaction with the possible participation of his descendants in it. The poet's disapproval is also latent in the phrase 'marriage with a fool' which refers to Maud Gonne's marriage to Major MacBride, both of them ardent and revolutionary nationalists. But now he seems to have a milder and less critical reaction towards it. He seems to sympathize with the fighting nationalists who are entangled in war. A comparable attitude is implied in a letter to Olivia Shakespear when Yeats describes these soldiers:

I have just heard that when Mrs. Campbell's house was burnt-the house I speak of on last page-she appealed to the irregulars not to turn her children out in the night. The irregulars cried but said they could not help themselves, the new orders. Presently one of them went up stairs with Mrs. Campbell to fetch down-the house was I think already burning-the children's Xmas toys. Strange tragedy of thought that creates for such men such crimes but I don't suppose that these men were mere conscripted rebels (*L*, 695).

In the next stanza the poet, the man of contemplation, meets another man of action, this time a Free State soldier: 'A brown Lieutenant and his men, / Half dressed in national uniform, / Stand at my door, and I complain / Of the foul weather, hail and rain, / A pear-tree broken by the storm' (VP, 424). A sense of or at least a wish for intimacy between the poet and the soldier is implied by the former's complaint 'Of foul weather' to the latter. Then we have the image of a 'moor-hen' which symbolizes the poet, the man of imagination who is not directly involved in the war. Up to this point in the poem, the speaker has somehow tried to distance himself from the civil war by taking refuge in his old Anglo-Irish castle. Now once again he turns back to his tower: 'I count those feathered balls of soot / The moor-hen guides upon the stream, / To silence the envy in my thought; / And turn towards my chamber, caught / In the cold snows of a dream' (VP, 424). This is the same chamber he had been writing in, associating it with British tradition ('*Il Penseroso's* Platonist toiled on / In some like chamber ...' (VP, 419)) and thus somehow finding solace in comparing himself to Milton's character. Yet this time Yeats cannot find comfort in his retreat into a world of privacy, and, turning towards his chamber after meeting with the nationalist fighters, he feels envious of them. This sense of envy towards the nationalist soldiers suggests Yeats's implicit desire to identify with them. The poet is now dissatisfied with the coldness of his dreams, the nostalgic dreams about the inherited glory of an aristocratic Anglo-Irish past, and longs to take part in action, side by side with the militant nationalists. The binary of action versus imagination has always been an important antinomy in Yeats's life and work, as a letter written on November 15th, 1936 to Ethel Mannin reveals: 'All my life it has been hard to keep from action, as I wrote when a boy, -'to be not of the things I dream'' (L, 868). The men of action, the warring nationalist soldiers, are what he has always aspired to be, and now, confronting the Republican and the Irish Free State fighters, the poet envies 'their purposefulness, their gregariousness and their careless disregard for death, all the qualities he had wished for his own life and had had to manufacture'.<sup>45</sup>

If 'The Road at my Door' betrays the speaker's dormant and suppressed attraction towards and identification with the nationalist combatants, the next part, 'The Stare's

Nest by my Window', reveals his heart-felt horror at the sinister outcomes of a destructive nationalism which threatens the poet and his class: 'The bees build in the crevices / Of loosening masonry, and there / The mother birds bring grubs and flies. / My wall is loosening; honey-bees, / Come build in the empty house of the stare' (*VP*, 424). The sweetness of nature is contrasted with the atrocities of a bloody conflict, which reminds us of 'Easter, 1916' when the sacrifice of the rebels, though heroic, had disturbed 'the living stream' forever. The speaker's lack of partisanship for either side of the conflict is reflected in the way he describes the casualties of war: 'We are closed in, and the key is turned / On our uncertainty; somewhere / A man is killed, or a house burned, / ... / Last night they trundled down the road / That dead young soldier in his blood:' (*VP*, 425) We do not know to whom 'they' refers, or to which faction the 'dead young soldier' belongs. Yeats indicts all the nationalists, those who are fighting against each other at the present and those who during the past years have contributed to the blind nationalist simplicities, including the poet himself: 'We had fed the heart on fantasies, / The heart's grown brutal from the fare; / More substance in our enmities / Than in our love; O honey-bees, / Come build in the empty house of the stare' (*VP*, 425). By employing the first plural pronoun 'we' he refuses to make any distinction between Republicans or Free State supporters; both sides are responsible for the destructiveness and the brutality of the actual war. In Donald Torchiana's terms, 'both sides have become murderous in their pursuit of abstractions'.<sup>46</sup>

To the poet, the Republicans and the Free State supporters are only thinking about their own fantasies and not the greater good for Ireland. Moreover, 'we' conveys a sense of shared responsibility on the part of the speaker who in a retrospective view now admits his own guilt. Thus the desired identification with the nationalists which was implied in the previous part by the poet's envy towards the fighters in the civil war is once more put forward. 'We' implicates Yeats along with the nationalists regardless of their ideological orientation. The national poet is included among the defenders of the cause of militant nationalism which has led to the present violence of the civil war by virtue of their fantasies, their naive romantic national aspirations: 'I am a man of letters. It is difficult for me to hate anything very deeply. My life is too

quiet for that. But I know that a nation cannot be powerful, cannot be ready for necessary battle, unless it has hatred as well as love in its heart' (*CW X*, 110).

But now the Irish nation seems to have forgotten love and is acting merely out of hatred and fanaticism. The long title of the last part of 'Meditations in Time of civil War' embodies the present violent situation as the poet sees it: 'I See Phantoms of Hatred and of the Heart's Fullness and of the Coming Emptiness'. Climbing to the top of his tower and leaning on its broken wall, an indication of his broken and divided loyalties, the poet experiences some mentally disturbing visions: 'Frenzies bewilder, reveries perturb the mind; / Monstrous familiar images swim to the mind's eye. / 'Vengeance upon the murderers,' the cry goes up, / 'Vengeance for Jacques Molay.'" (*VP*, 426) The story of Templar knight Jacques Molay and his followers is invoked as a metaphor for the present situation in Ireland. Jacques Molay was the last grand master of the Knights Templar, or the Order of the Temple, one of the most famous of the Christian military orders during the Crusades. After being accused of heresy he was burned alive by order of Philip the Fair, King of France, in 1314. The scene Yeats is describing includes images of an angry mob calling for vengeance upon Molay's murderers. Molay was considered a martyr by his followers who violently caused destruction and death to avenge him. These lines do not express any positive or negative attitude towards Molay, but they do contain disparagement of 'The rage-driven, rage-tormented, and rage-hungry troop,' who claimed to be his avengers (*VP*, 426). According to Cullingford the purport of this stanza is to show that:

What began as the struggle to avenge a genuine wrong, and to gain Ireland's independence from England, has degenerated into fratricidal strife. The policy of deliberate "reprisals" or revenge killings, practiced by British soldiers during the Anglo-Irish War, is now being used by the Irish against each other. Violence has become self-generating, self-sustaining, and self-destructive.<sup>47</sup>

As I have already argued in the previous chapter, Yeats's attitude towards the martyrs of the Easter rising was a mixture of approval and disapproval. In his elegiac poem 'Easter 1916' he at times praised and at other times expressed his doubt as to their sacrifice. However, by the time of the troubles in 1919-1922 he regarded the cult of



martyrdom as out-dated and perilous. In a letter to Olivia Shakespear written around the time he was working on 'Meditations in Time of Civil War' Yeats commented: 'Perhaps there is nothing so dangerous to a modern state, when politics take the place of theology, as a bunch of martyrs. A bunch of martyrs (1916) were the bomb and we are living in the explosion' (*L*, 690). Now the avengers of Jaques Molay symbolise the nationalist combatants of the Civil War who regard themselves as the inheritors of the past Irish martyrs, hence the familiarity of the following line: 'monstrous familiar images swim to the mind's eye'. In a note to these lines Yeats mentions that 'A cry for vengeance because of the murder of the Grand Master of the Templars seems to me fit symbol for those who labour for hatred, and so for sterility in various kinds' (*VP*, 827). Yeats had already characterised the extreme nationalists who protested against Synge's play as 'Eunuchs', emasculated by their hatred, in 'On those that hated The Playboy of the Western World, 1907'. In his memoirs he would regret that, 'Ireland has grown sterile, because power has passed to men who lack the training which requires a certain amount of wealth to ensure continuity from generation to generation, and to free the mind in part from other tasks' (*Mem*, 178). During the Civil War he confided to Lady Gregory that 'both sides are responsible for this whirlpool of hate'.<sup>48</sup> The implied conclusion one obtains from these quotations is that Yeats considers a nationalism which takes its origins from hatred as a *sterile* nationalism. But a study of the place of hatred in his life and works shows his own share and complicity in arousing the patriotic emotional hatred he is now regarding with awe and terror. He could admit how his own writings had contributed to an intensification of Irish patriotic hatred: 'New from the influence, mainly the personal influence, of William Morris, I dreamed of enlarging Irish hate, till we had come to hate with a passion of patriotism what Morris and Ruskin hated' (*E & I*, 248). In another place he confesses: 'no people hate as we do in whom the past is always alive, there are moments when hatred poisons my life and I accuse myself of effeminacy because I have not given it adequate expression' (*E & I*, 519).

In the following lines of the poem the speaker's sinister vision is portrayed in more gross details: 'Trooper belabouring trooper, biting at arm or at face, / Plunges towards

nothing, arms and fingers spreading wide / For the embrace of nothing;' (*VP*, 426) The poet is pondering the violence and brutality of a civil war which looks meaningless and futile as both sides are struggling 'towards nothing ... For the embrace of nothing'. Note the nihilistic implications in this repetition of the word 'nothing'. All is a 'senseless tumult', as the next line puts it, and naturally we as readers anticipate the poet to distance himself from the furious mob, yet he somehow implicates himself in this whirlpool of hate and violence: 'and I, my wits astray / Because of all that senseless tumult, all but cried / For vengeance on the murderers of Jaques Molay' (*VP*, 426). According to Elizabeth Cullingford, while reading these lines, 'one might expect the speaker's reaction to so horrible an image to be entirely negative, but instead, like Conrad's Marlow, he testifies to the fascination of the abomination; he too has felt the urge to participate in the orgy of hatred'. Cullingford tries to explain away the speaker's inclination to join the crowd as a poetic technique: 'by this poetic strategy the speaker is drawn into the world of his vision, thus objectifying and validating it for the reader'.<sup>49</sup> However, this does not alter the fact that the speaker is actually tempted to take part in the violence he is describing so vividly. While being horrified by the monstrous behaviour of the fighters, he is somehow inclined to join them. His 'wits astray', he finds himself in the middle of the crazy crowd, tempted to cry with them for vengeance upon the murderers. This mixture of detachment from and identification with the 'troopers' who stand for the opposing sides of the Irish civil war suggests Yeats's internal turmoil. The grotesque images he is envisioning seem to reflect his emotional and mental tensions during this period.

In contrast to the gruesome images of the previous stanza, the next vision of the poet imparts a sense of calmness and tranquillity by depicting 'Magical unicorns' carrying ladies with 'musing eyes'. Instead of the commotion of the battle there is now 'Nothing but stillness' and instead of hatred 'hearts are full / Of their own sweetness, bodies of their loveliness' (*VP*, 426). But this is only a temporary break in the chain of clamorous monstrosity, as all of a sudden these soft and beautiful images 'Give place to an indifferent multitude, give place / To brazen hawks. Nor self-delighting reverie, / Nor hate of what's to come, nor pity for what's gone, / Nothing but grip of claw, and

the eye's complacency, / The innumerable clanging wings that have put out / the moon' (*VP*, 427). Then in the closing stanza, once again the theme of the man of action versus the man of contemplation is put forward:

I turn away and shut the door, and on the stair  
Wonder how many times I could have proved my worth  
In something that all others understand or share;  
But O! ambitious heart, had such a proof drawn forth  
A company of friends, a conscience set at ease,  
It had but made us pine the more. The abstract joy,  
The half-read wisdom of daemonic images,  
Suffice the ageing man as once the growing boy (*VP*, 427).

The final lines of the poem are significant in that they act as a kind of conclusion to the previous parts. By expressing his dormant wish to be a fighter, Yeats reveals his inclination to identify with the nationalists regardless of the side they are fighting for. The speaker's internal tension seems to be irresolvable in spite of his attempt at self-consolation. Had he chosen to take part in the national struggle, he would have gained the favour of his nationalist friends and eased his conscience, yet at the same time that choice would have made him 'pine the more', so he tries to comfort himself with 'The abstract joy, / The half-read wisdom of daemonic images'. The joy of the poet's knowledge is described as 'abstract', an adjective with obvious negative and undesirable connotations in Yeats terminology: 'Did she in touching that lone wing / Recall the years before her mind / Became a bitter, an abstract thing,' he had written disapprovingly of Constance Markiewicz (*VP*, 397). In another instance while discussing different kinds of poetry with his father in a letter he disparages abstract poetry as 'incompatible with life' and prefers 'Keats perhaps greater than Shelley and beyond words greater than Swinburne because he makes pictures one cannot forget and sees them as full of rhythm as a Chinese painting. Swinburne's poetry, all but some early poems, is as abstract as a cubist picture' (*L*, 608). So in the concluding lines of 'Meditations in Time of Civil War' his use of the word 'abstract' and also the inherent irony of 'suffice' should make us wary of the sufficiency of 'half-read wisdom' which the poet resorts to as an alternative to the world of action. Cullingford has argued that 'the self-irony evident in the choice of a joy that is 'abstract' and a

wisdom that is only 'half-read'...deflates the magian pretensions of the speaker and returns him to the world we all live in: the world of uncertainty, doubt, and failure'.<sup>50</sup> Moreover the sporadic outbursts of the speaker's wishful envy towards his fighting countrymen, expressed in part five of the poem, suggest the inadequacy of his present choice; to take refuge in 'the abstract joy' of his art. It also points to a failure on his part to satisfactorily resolve his internal state of tension. As Richard Ellmann has put it, Yeats's argument in the concluding lines of the poem 'was perfectly true but did not altogether convince him'.<sup>51</sup> Norman Jeffares has also expressed a similar view: 'In the fifth section of the poem his contemplative life seems useless, measured against the active purpose and appeal of the soldier's life'.<sup>52</sup>

'Meditations in Time of Civil War' has been mostly interpreted as a lamentation for the colonial Anglo-Irish tradition and an aristocratic critique of militant Irish nationalism. I have tried to show that far from complete attachment to one and absolute detachment from the other Yeats's poem uncovers his conflicted feelings about and complicated relationship with these two traditions. The simultaneous approval and disapproval, sympathy and antipathy, admiration and condemnation of the settler-colonial culture of the Anglo-Irish and the indigenous culture of Irish nationalism lie behind the poem. Moreover, with regard to his nationalistic affiliations, Yeats's ambivalence about his involvement in the Irish civil war and his final refusal to take sides publicly with either side of the fighting nationalists betrays his unresolved political loyalties. All this should caution us against imposing the straightjacket of a fixed colonial or anti-colonial identity upon him. On the contrary it should encourage us to foreground the issue of hybridity as an intermixing of distinct and even opposing entities in examining his works. 'Meditations in Time of Civil War' deals with questions of identity and nationalism which have always been central issues to the discourse of postcolonialism. Throughout the poem Yeats's often conflicted allegiances and loyalties with regard to the Irish anti-colonial struggle point to his fluid and ambivalent status as an Irish nationalist. Moreover the simultaneous rejection and embrace of overlapping and sometimes opposing identities in the poem serve as an instance of his in-between and hybrid colonial identity. In 'Meditations in

Time of the Civil War' Yeats is torn between a qualified eulogizing of the colonial past of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy and an implied attraction towards the nationalist tradition on the one hand and an acknowledgment of the shortcomings of both traditions which has led to the present violence and brutality of the Civil War on the other. Homi Bhabha has argued for the fluidity and flexibility of colonial situations, emphasizing the ambiguity of colonial subject positions, and warning against applying an either/or approach to the issue of colonial identities:

The colonial signifier-neither one nor other-is, however, an act of ambivalent signification, literally splitting the difference between the binary oppositions or polarities through which we think cultural difference. It is in the enunciatory act of splitting that the colonial signifier creates its strategies of differentiation that produce an undecidability between contraries or oppositions.<sup>53</sup>

Yeats's unresolved ambivalence and doubled attitude to the 'contraries' of his colonial Anglo-Irish background and his national affiliations in 'Meditations in Time of Civil War', is an example of the divided identity of (post)colonial subject, 'neither one nor the other', inhabiting a third space outside either centre or margin.

#### **'NINETEEN HUNDRED AND NINETEEN'**

'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen' has received much diverse critical appraisal. Stan Smith has called it 'a poem about the last stages of that revolt against British rule'.<sup>54</sup> By 'that revolt' Smith means the Easter Rising of 1916. Michael Tratner believes that in 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen' Yeats 'begins to create a terrorist poetry, a poetry that is truly postcolonial because it goes beyond the entire colonial world that formed the mind of Yeats himself. In this poem, he shows how he finally was driven by the winds of change to break with himself, his own values, his own sense of good and evil'.<sup>55</sup> Wolfgang Wight has read the poem as reflecting the 'disenchantment of high-flying dreams indebted to the historical process'.<sup>56</sup> According to Paul Scott Stanfield, in this poem as well as in other poems such as 'Reprisals' and 'The Stare's Nest at my Window' Yeats shows the horrors of political violence, but Stanfield concludes that 'violence did not make him uneasy, he did not believe mankind would ever be able to

do without it, and he believed governments could legitimately employ it. He took pains to free himself of every kind of cant about violence, and so often appeared to speak of it with unnecessary relish'.<sup>57</sup> Marjorie Howes notes that 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen' 'aligns the corruption of the public and private virtues Yeats attributed to the Anglo-Irish with female sexual depravity' and 'laments the decline of all these things during the Anglo-Irish War'.<sup>58</sup> A number of critics have emphasized Yeats's distance from and questioning of Irish nationalism in the poem. Agustín Martín, for example, notes that in 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen' Yeats 'faces without flinching the consequences of Easter Week in the horror of the Black and Tan war'.<sup>59</sup> Rob Doggett holds that in both 'Meditations in Time of Civil War' and 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen', 'far from reinscribing an outmoded nationalist mindset that idealizes one form of Irish identity, eighteenth-century or otherwise, Yeats pointedly challenges former and current nationalist narratives of history by focusing instead upon instances of rupture and the chaos of the present'.<sup>60</sup> What I am going to argue for is that Yeats's denunciation is directed at both Irish nationalism and British colonialism. In the period during which Ireland was undergoing the transition from a colonial to a postcolonial state, 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen' casts doubts on the claims and agendas of both sides of the colonial crisis, the colonized Irish and the colonizing English. It thus involves both sides of the colonial conflict and puts the blame on them for bringing about the murderous present situation in Ireland. A poem which was first triggered by the atrocities committed by the British colonial forces turns out to reveal its speaker's disappointment with, and detachment from, both sides of the Anglo-Irish war. Yeats's refusal to distinguish between the colonizer and the colonized and his doubts, inability, and reluctance to identify with either side (unless with both) sums up his ambiguous and conflicted colonial identity.

'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen' was in fact written in 1921 and was originally titled 'Thoughts upon the Present State of the World' and dated 'May, 1921', a title which hints at its broad and international sweep. Yeats described the poem as 'not philosophical but simple and passionate, a lamentation over lost peace and lost hope' (*L*, 668). The poet was reflecting on the critical, world-wide events which had

occurred in the second decade of the twentieth century: the First World War, the Russian Revolution, and, last but not the least, the Anglo-Irish war. In fact the subsequent retitling of the poem points to the significance of 1919 for Yeats, the first year of Anglo-Irish conflict. In that year the nationalist Irish Republican Army engaged in a ferocious war against the Irish Royal police and British soldiers known as Black and Tans and Auxiliaries in order to achieve independence. I will focus on the Irish context of the poem, which, as several critics have rightly pointed out, is highly significant. A. Norman Jeffares has remarked that the change of title shows that 'For Yeats the world ultimately meant Ireland and the poems were inevitably based on the state of things in Ireland'.<sup>61</sup> R. F. Foster also notes how 'Yeats turned his poem about the dislocations of the world after the Great War into a poem about the Irish war instead' and 'as times went by, he evidently decided to stress the *Irish* war as the poem's theme, rather than the more cosmic conflict which really lies behind it'.<sup>62</sup>

'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen' consists of six sections. The first section is the longest one. It includes six eight-lined stanzas. According to Jeffares, the first part of the poem 'was inspired by the brutal behaviour of the Black and Tans' which he goes on to describe as '(a hastily recruited military force brought into Ireland by the British Government in the period before the 1922 Treaty)'.<sup>63</sup> Yeats had already expressed his disgust at their violence in 'Reprisals', a poem addressed to Lady Gregory's son Robert, who was killed in action during the First World War, and titled after the cruel policy of reprisals carried on by these infamous forces: 'Half-drunk or whole-mad soldiery / Are murdering your tenants there. / Men that revere your father yet / Are shot at in the open plain. / Where may new-married women sit / And suckle children now? Armed men / May murder them in passing by / Nor law nor parliament take heed' (*VP*, 791). The same imagery is used in the third stanza of 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen', but before that the speaker starts the poem by lamenting the disappearance of a glorious past: 'Many ingenious lovely things are gone / That were sheer miracle to the multitude'. By bringing artistic examples of ancient Greece, such as 'the ornamental bronze and stone / An ancient image made of olive wood- / ... Phidias' famous ivories', Yeats might be hinting at the absence, futility, or irrelevance

of art; his own profession at a time of action, when his countrymen are fighting. (VP, 428) This makes more sense when we look at the first poem of *The Tower* ('Sailing to Byzantium') where the old poet, tired and despondent at the artless, materialistic and sensuous society he is living in, feels out of place in his own country and so complains of his present situation. In both poems Yeats voices his dissatisfaction with an Ireland where he does not feel at home. There is and has always been a gap between the poet and the people who do not appreciate the immortality of art, the 'multitude' to which the works of art is a 'sheer miracle'. The reader is reminded of Yeats's quarrels with middle-class nationalist Ireland and his contempt for and rage at them for not appreciating what he considered true art in cases such as the controversial 'Abbey' plays or Hugh Lane's paintings.

The second stanza of 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen' opens up with a note of ironic self-criticism: 'We too had many pretty toys when young: / A law indifferent to blame or praise, / To bribe or threat; habits that made old wrong / Melt down, as it were wax in the sun's rays;' (VP, 428). Critics generally have interpreted this stanza and the next as the poet's reflections on the failure and bankruptcy of the optimistic but illusional and naïve ideals of the Victorian era, ideals such as world peace and stability, progress and the improvement of mankind. Jeffares has read this part of the poem as Yeats's indignant contemplation of 'the general belief in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that the world was getting better because of democratic politics and physical science', and Cullingford believes that the poet's disillusioned criticism of the 'pretty toys' of his youth refers to a common blind faith in 'Victorian stability, peace, and belief in progress'.<sup>64</sup> The important point here is that Yeats uses the pronoun 'we' and in the local context of the Anglo-Irish war this clearly involves both sides, Imperialist Britain and Colonized Ireland. He is therefore castigating the naive convictions and delusions of both nationalists and unionists. If the 'pretty toys' of the English colonizers, of 'Parliament and king', has been the myth of a civilizing mission, that of the Irish colonized has been the utopian vision of a postcolonial country, and in order to achieve their ideals neither side has turned their 'cannon' into a 'ploughshare'.



However, we do not know for sure to which side, if any, the poet's allegiances belong. In his personal and public utterances around the same time Yeats makes no clear demarcation between England and Ireland. Rather, an equation of both sides is expressed. If there is a condemnation, it is directed at both countries. For example in 1922 he wrote to J. C. Grierson: 'we have had years now of murder and arson in which both nations have shared impartially' (*L*, 690). If there is an expression of sympathy and attachment, again it belongs to both sides of the colonial binary as the following incident shows. In a public speech delivered in Oxford Union and published in the *Freeman Journal* Yeats begins by condemning the policy of England in Ireland: 'Tonight, at the debate of the Oxford Union Society, Mr. William Butler Yeats broke the political silence of thirty years with words of scathing denunciation on England's treatment of Ireland. ...Mr. Yeats said he did not know which lay most heavily on his heart - Ireland or England. Ireland would come out strengthened by suffering, but England'.<sup>65</sup> Cullingford mentions this report of Yeats's speech to point out (quite rightly) his condemnation of the English government's policy in Ireland. However, she does not comment on the last part, which clearly expresses Yeats's double bonds with, and attachment to both England and Ireland. She concludes that 'Yeats's fierce speech left his hearers in no doubt as to where his sympathies lay'.<sup>66</sup> Yet, Yeats uncertainty as to 'which lay most heavily on his heart-Ireland or England' should leave at least some room for doubt as to where 'his sympathies lay'. Equating both sides of the colonial conflict is a sign of the poet's divided and fragmented colonial identity.

The fourth stanza brings us back, rather abruptly, to the present moment. The catastrophic scenes of this stanza with its grim and shocking description of the horrors of war remind us of 'The Second Coming', Yeats's most apocalyptic poem:

Now days are dragon-ridden, the nightmare  
Rides upon sleep: a drunken soldiery  
Can leave the mother, murdered at her door,  
To crawl in her own blood, and go scot-free;  
The night can sweat with terror as before  
We pierced our thoughts into philosophy,

And planned to bring the world under a rule,  
Who are but weasels fighting in a hole (*VP*, 429).

Apparently, the poet is depicting the actual atrocities committed by the notorious Black and Tans, the forces of a colonizing power fighting to subdue the colonized struggle for independence. The scene portrayed here refers to the killing of Ellen Quinn, an Irish woman who was killed while holding her child in her arms. However, by using 'we' in the sixth line of the stanza, Yeats does not just point an accusing finger at the English forces who have actually committed this crime – he also involves the opposite side as well. As Robert Mohr asserts: 'While the actual murder of Mrs Ellen Quinn at Gort by the Black and Tan feeds the horror of this message, that blame insulates neither Yeats nor the reader from implication. The imagination implicates everyone in the event... No one escapes involvement in the horror'.<sup>67</sup> The poem interrogates the bombastic pretensions and the claims of both the colonizer and the colonized 'to bring the world under a rule'. 'Public opinion' includes the opinions of both Irish and English societies, both of which regardless of their motives are indicted by a poet who now refers to them, himself included, as wild animals, as 'weasels fighting in a hole'.

In the final stanza of the first section images of an ancient war and a burning town are invoked to portray the destruction of the present war: 'Incendiary or bigot could be found / To burn that stump on the Acropolis,' though 'None dared admit, if such thought were his' (*VP*, 430). In 1919 Irish houses were put to fire by Black and Tans but here the neutrality and the generality of the first line involves the Irish as well, 'Incendiary or bigot could be found' on both sides. In such a turbulent world the speaker who is shocked and abhorred by the chaos of the war tries to find some comfort by resorting to his own solitary mind. Ironically though, his is a 'ghostly solitude', implying its separation from life. Likewise the consolation of an art which is secluded from reality does not seem to provide a safe and reliable sanctuary in the present disordered situation. Therefore the seemingly consoling artistic image of the second part of the poem, which portrays 'Chinese dancers' winding around 'a shining web, a floating ribbon of cloth,' turns out to be just a transitory moment of aesthetic

relief. Although beautiful, the image of dancers and ribbons very soon turns into the same image which was used by the poet to describe the brutality of the war, the image of a dragon. Although 'a dragon of air', it 'Had fallen among dancers, had whirled them around / Or hurried them off on its own furious path;' There seems to be no escape from the 'dragon-ridden' days of war and the poet has to admit that there is no difference between both parties who are creating these bleak days as 'All men are dancers and their tread / Goes to the barbarous clangour of a gong' (*VP*, 430).

In part three the speaker who is still trying to remain detached from the actual troubled world around him retreats into his private world hoping to overcome his sense of disappointment and isolation. He now compares his solitude with that of a swan: 'Some moralist or mythological poet / Compares the solitary soul to a swan; / I am satisfied with that, / Satisfied if a troubled mirror show it, / Before that brief gleam of its life be gone, / An image of its state;' (*VP*, 430) He claims to be satisfied with his solitude, with the self-sufficiency of his art, with the world of contemplation. In contrast to the men of action who are 'dancers and their tread / Goes to the barbarous clangour of a gong.', the solitary artist, like his image of a proud and care-free swan, has spread his wings and rides over 'Those winds that clamour of approaching night'. Yet a sense of hesitation is felt as the swan is caught between two impulses, 'whether to play, or to ride' (*VP*, 431). The poet is tempted to play his part in action, like the fighters, like the dancers of the previous stanza and the Falstaffian soldier of the time of civil war. According to John Unterecker, in parts two and three of the poem 'Yeats contrasts the dragon-headed mob with the swan-like solitary soul'.<sup>68</sup> Thus the theme of man of action versus man of contemplation which was at work in 'Meditations in Time of Civil War' is brought into play in 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen'. In the former poem the sufficiency of his art, 'The abstract joy, / The half-read wisdom of daemonic images,' which the poet had claimed would 'Suffice the aging man as the growing boy' was doubtful and ambiguous. Likewise, in the latter poem this insufficiency is still more evident, as a resigned poet has to confess in the next stanza: 'A man in his own secret meditation / Is lost amid the labyrinth that he has made / In art or politics;' (*VP*, 431) The poet's alleged satisfaction with a detachment from the

world of action gives way to an awareness of his internal tensions. If Irish society or the outside world of action is like a 'troubled mirror', then the inside world of the poet's mind fares no better as he is caught in the maze of his art and politics.

In some of Yeats's other poems the symbol of swan is associated with absence, departure, and darkness. In 'The Tower', for example, 'the swan must fix his eye / Upon a fading gleam, / Float out upon a long / Last reach of glittering stream / And there sing his last song', and at the end of 'Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931' it 'drifts upon a darkening flood' (VP, 414, 492). Now once again the final ascent of the solitary swan is into a barren sky, suggesting a hopelessness and frustration on the part of the poet: 'The swan has leaped into desolate heaven: / That image can bring wildness, bring a rage / To end all things, to end / What my laborious life imagined, even / The half-imagined, the half-written page;' (VP, 431) Ironically, the poet who just a few lines before had voiced his satisfaction with the sufficiency of his solitude is now so despairing of his life's work that he is even ready to destroy his unfinished poem. Yet the poet's rage is not just directed at himself and his works. Once again the 'we' of the following lines implicates all other nationalists and the colonialists as well: 'O but we dreamed to mend / Whatever mischief seemed / To afflict mankind, but now / That winds of winter blow / Learn that we were crack-pated when we dreamed. / We, who seven years ago / Talked of honour and of truth, / Shriek with pleasure if we show / the weasel's twist, the weasel's tooth' (VP, 431). The 'we' of these lines implicates the nationalists whose dream has been the freedom of their country and the redressing of the wrong of colonialism, a dream to which in his youth Yeats had contributed with his cultural and political activities. However, the present bloodshed of the Anglo-Irish war seems to cast doubt on the validity of that dream. On the other hand, 'we' involves imperial England as well. Seven years earlier, in the context of a poem entitled 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen', obviously refers to the year 1912, when English Parliament was discussing about Home Rule Bill, the objective of which was to give limited autonomous status to Ireland. But the same politicians who were quiescently to concede home rule to their neighbouring colony had now sent troops to

retain their control over them. Yeats juxtaposes the colonizer and the colonized on the same side and questions the grandiloquent myths of both.

In the penultimate part of the poem, the word 'mock' is used repeatedly. It appears in the first lines of all the four stanzas and in the last line of the last stanza. In the first three stanzas, the poet is among those who mock 'the great', 'the wise', and 'the good'. In the last one he turns the table on the mockers, including himself: 'Mock mockers after that / That would not lift a hand maybe / To help good, wise or great / To bar that foul storm out, for we / Traffic in mockery' (*VP*, 432). The mockery encompasses all the great, the wise, and the good on both sides of the present conflict who did not foresee the destructive and 'the levelling wind' and 'the foul storm' of the war.

The last part of the poem reminds us of the last part of 'Meditations in Time of Civil War'. In a long, single, and breathless stanza the poet depicts the chaotic world of war: 'Violence upon the roads: violence of horses; / Some few have handsome riders, are garlanded / On delicate sensitive ear or tossing mane, / But wearied running round and round in their courses / All break and vanish, and evil gathers head:' (*VP*, 433) In an explanatory note on these lines, Yeats wrote: 'The country people see at times certain apparitions whom they name now 'fallen angels,' now 'ancient inhabitants of the country,' and describe as riding at whiles 'with flowers upon the heads of the horses.' I have assumed in the sixth poem that these horsemen, now that the times worsen, give way to worse' (*VP*, 433). What is interesting here is the speaker's neutrality as to the nationality of these horsemen; he does not identify them with either side of the conflict. For him, those who are engaged in violence are identical; they are not identified as Irish or English and we see no sign of partisanship on the part of the speaker for one side or the other. What is more, he finds no purpose or end in the Anglo-Irish war unless it is a gradual birth of evil: 'All break and vanish, and evil gathers head:' (*VP*, 433) The return of evil and the depiction of the present violence is portrayed by invoking two apocalyptic apparitions from Irish folklore. The first image is that of 'Herodias' daughters'. Yeats wrote in 1899 that 'Sidhe is also Gaelic for

wind ... They journey in whirling winds, the winds that were called the dance of the daughters of Herodias in the Middle Ages, Herodias doubtless taking the place of some old goddess' (*VP*, 800). According to Jeffares, 'Yeats may have been thinking of the traditional procession of witches on St John the Baptist's Eve'.<sup>69</sup> So the association of this image with the daughter of Herodias, Salome, who, according to the Bible asked for the head of John the Baptist, is quite possible. Both associations, as the following lines show, suggest that these women stand for terror, anarchy, prejudice, blindness, and violence: '“Herodias’ daughters have returned again, / A sudden blast of dusty wind and after / Thunder of feet, tumult of images, / Their purpose in the labyrinth of the wind; / And should some crazy hand dare touch a daughter / All turn with amorous cries, or angry cries, / According to the wind, for all are blind’. Then all of a sudden, the second horrific image introduces itself: 'But now wind drops, dust settles; thereupon / There lurches past, his great eyes without thought / Under the shadow of stupid straw-pale locks, / That insolent fiend Robert Artisson / To whom the love-lorn Lady Kyteler brought / Bronzed peacock feathers, red combs of her cocks' (*VP*, 433).

Robert Artisson, as Yeats explains, 'was an evil spirit much run after in Kilkenny at the start of the fourteenth century' (*VP*, 433). He was the incubus of Dame Alice Kyteler, a fourteenth-century witch who was believed to have killed her four husbands. What is significant in these two images is the portrayal of the violence of the Anglo-Irish war through infamous and feminine characters. As I have already pointed out in the previous chapter, in some of Yeats's works there is usually a connection between extreme nationalism in general and nationalist women activists in particular. Associated with concepts such as excess, hysteria, folly, and blindness, they are often depicted in negative and disfavoured ways, like 'a bitter, an abstract thing...Blind and leader of the blind' or 'staring in hysterical pride' (*VP*, 397, 601). Here in the last stanza of 'Nineteen hundred and Nineteen', as a number of critics have remarked, there appears to be an implied relationship between the weird female characters and Irish nationalism. Rob Doggett, for example, notes that the 'image of a "love-lorn" woman making a sacrifice' recalls 'women, such as Maud Gonne and

Constance Gore-Booth, who sacrificed all (or, at least, what Yeats considered as “all”) to the cause of extreme nationalism’. Stan Smith, in turn, believes that the strange love story of Dame Alice Kyteler and Robert Artisson ‘is a veiled recall of Maud Gonne’s infatuation with and marriage to the ‘drunken, vainglorious lout’ John MacBride’.<sup>70</sup> While agreeing with these views I want to emphasize that ultimately the blindness and the brutality of these final strange characters of the last stanza, along with the rest of the poem as a whole, targets not only extreme nationalism but also its counterpart, aggressive colonialism. In other words the blind aspirations of both sides of the Anglo-Irish war are indicted by a poet whose own final allegiance is not certain.

## CONCLUSION

Seamus Deane has argued that Yeats’s great poetry of the 1920s is ‘based upon antinomies - Ireland and Byzantium, youth and age, fecund life and stylized art, action and contemplation, love and war, violent energy and decadent civilization - which gain definition from one another without ever reaching, or seriously seeking, reconciliation’.<sup>71</sup> What Deane puts forward here is a significant characteristic of the *The Tower* poems. However, we can add one more antinomy to Deane’s list, and that is: Irish nationalism and British colonialism. As the purpose of this chapter and my thesis in general has been to review the complex relationship of Yeats to the question of Irish nationalism and British colonialism, I have confined myself to this last antinomy. In this chapter I have argued that Yeats had an uncertain, unresolved, and doubled attitude to the Irish situation.

In discussing ‘Meditations in Time of Civil War’ and ‘Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen’ I have tried to foreground the question of Yeats’s hybrid colonial identity. Far from depicting Yeats as an ardent nationalist or a reserved unionist these poems reveal his unresolved vacillation between the pull of different allegiances towards the colonizer and the colonized. The following quotation is a characteristic example which highlights Yeats’s internal uncertainty and ambivalence as to where his true loyalties lie:

In the last week I have been planning to live in Dublin-George very urgent for this-but I feel now that all may be blood and misery. If that comes we may abandon Ballylee to the owls and the rats, and England too (where passions will rise and I shall find myself with no answer), and live in some far land. Should England and Ireland be divided beyond all hope of remedy, what else could one do for the children's sake, or one's own work? I could not bring them to Ireland where they would inherit bitterness, nor leave them in England where, being Irish by tradition, and by family and fame, they would be in an unnatural condition of mind and grow, as so many Irishmen who live here do, sour and argumentative (*L*, 675).

These lines are from a letter written in 1921, during the Anglo-Irish war when the Irish were fighting for independence and the English were striving to retain their rule in Ireland. A sense of detachment from both countries and not belonging to either is suggested by the poet's uncertainty as to where to accommodate his family in this time of trouble. Yeats moreover seems somehow to equate both sides – England the colonizer and Ireland the colonized – and he seems to be uncertain as to where his loyalty should lie. A line like 'Should England and Ireland be divided beyond all hope of remedy,' implies a sense of resentment and resignation on the part of the speaker who seems bitter with or at least thoughtful about the prospect of Ireland separating from England. In another instance and during the time English government was trying to conscript Irish youth to serve in the First World War, Yeats wrote to a correspondent, 'If conscription is imposed ... There will be incidents that will become anecdotes and legends.... Each side will have its wrongs to tell of and these will keep England and Ireland apart during your lifetime and mine'.<sup>72</sup> Comments such as these proliferate in Yeats's writings at this time; they reflect his conflicted colonial identity, his position as someone trying to live on the borderline with an unresolved inner conflict.

Comparing his concept of 'splitting' to Orwell's 'doublethink', Bhabha asserts that in both of these two theories, 'the effort has to be made to live on the cusp, to deal with two contradictory things at the same time without either transcending or repressing that contradiction'. He then goes on to stress: 'I'm not using the 'doublethink' idea



with Orwell's sense of moral indictment. For me, it's much more the idea of survival/surviving in a strong sense – dealing with or living with and through contradiction and then using that process for social agency'.<sup>73</sup> Briefly speaking, in Orwell, 'doublethink' refers to coping with contradictions which cannot be solved otherwise, by keeping two opposite versions of something in mind at once. According to Orwell himself, '*Doublethink* means the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them'.<sup>74</sup> I believe that the psychological tensions and intellectual complexities in both 'Meditations in Time of Civil War' and 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen' can be read as examples of 'splitting' and 'doublethink'. His response to the question of colonial identity was much more complicated than a simple detachment from or attachment to either side of the colonial divide, withdrawal and involvement existed side by side in Yeats's connections with Irish nationalism and British colonialism. I have endeavoured to point out some characteristic examples of his double, changing, fluid and conflicting political views in order to show just how unresolved Yeats's thinking on these issues was. In both 'Meditations in Time of Civil War' and 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen' the poet's attitude towards the Irish colonized and the English colonizer falls short of distinguishing between them. Finally there is no complete identification with or alienation from either side. Yeats's position thus breaks the dual distinction between the colonized and the colonizer and points to a hybrid colonial status which finally fits neither side of the colonial binary comfortably. It is the existence of characteristics such as thinking in polarities, subscribing to opposite principles, and being unable to resolve his conflicting affiliations in late Yeats, which challenge a facile and simplistic reading of his colonial subject position, and ultimately fills his poetry with a sense of tension, adding to its appeal, power, and energy.

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Seamus Heaney, 'The Defiant Self', in *Guardian* (Saturday March 18, 2006), 2.
- <sup>2</sup> Homi Bhabha, 'Foreword: Remembering Fanon', in Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 1986), vii-xxv, xvi.
- <sup>3</sup> Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, trans., Howard Greenfield (London: Earthscan, 2003), 5.
- <sup>4</sup> According to Richard J. Finneran 'The New Faces' was written in 1912 and 'the second part of "Fragments" possibly composed as late as September 1933'. "'From Things Becoming to the Thing Become": The Construction of W. B. Yeats's *The Tower*', in *South Atlantic Review*, 63:1 (Winter, 1998), 35-55, 35.
- <sup>5</sup> For an extensive and detailed account of *The Tower*'s publication history and of the different and numerous orderings of the poems, see Finneran's essay mentioned above. See also M. L. Rosenthal, *Running to Paradise: Yeats's Poetic Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 217-63.
- <sup>6</sup> Rosenthal, *Running to Paradise*, 218.
- <sup>7</sup> Joseph Hone, *W. B. Yeats, 1865-1939* (London: Macmillan, 1962), 360.
- <sup>8</sup> B. L. Reid, *William Butler Yeats: The Lyric of Tragedy* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), 173.
- <sup>9</sup> See Michael Brennan, *The War in Clare 1911-1921: Personal Memoirs of the Irish War of Independence* (Dublin: Four Courts, 1980). See also Peter Hart, *The I.R.A. at War, 1916-1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
- <sup>10</sup> For a detailed account of the Irish Civil War see Michael Hopkinson, *Green Against Green: The Irish Civil War* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1988). See also Bill Kissane, *The Politics of the Irish Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). For the formation of the Irish Free State see Joseph M. Curran, *The Birth of the Irish Free State, 1921-1923* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1980).
- <sup>11</sup> Quoted in Paul Scott Stanfield, *Yeats and Politics in the 1930s* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), 68.
- <sup>12</sup> Quoted in Elizabeth Cullingford, *Yeats, Ireland and Fascism* (London: Macmillan, 1981), 112.
- <sup>13</sup> For an account of the rise and the decline of the Anglo-Irish class see Terence De Vere White, *The Anglo-Irish* (London: Gollancz, 1972), Patrick Buckland, *The Anglo-*

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*Irish and the New Ireland, 1885–1922* (Dublin: London: Gill and Macmillan, 1972), and Terence A. M. Dooley, *The Decline of the Big House in Ireland* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 2001).

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Donald T. Torchiana, *W. B. Yeats & Georgian Ireland* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1992), 24-5.

<sup>15</sup> Torchiana, *W.B. Yeats & Georgian Ireland*, 89, Stanfield, *Yeats and Politics in the 1930s*, 44.

<sup>16</sup> See for example Torchiana, *W. B. Yeats & Georgian Ireland*, Julian Moynahan, *Anglo-Irish: The Literary Imagination in a Hyphenated Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), Derek Hand, 'Breaking Boundaries, Creating Spaces: W.B. Yeats's "The Words Upon the Window-Pane" as a Postcolonial Text', in ed., Deborah Fleming, *W. B. Yeats and Postcolonialism* (West Cornwall, CT: Locus Hill, 2001), 187-204.

<sup>17</sup> Marjorie Elizabeth Howes, *Yeats's Nations: Gender, Class, and Irishness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 103.

<sup>18</sup> Rob Doggett, *Deep-Rooted Things: Empire and Nation in the Poetry and Drama of William Butler Yeats* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 165, note 35.

<sup>19</sup> Elizabeth Cullingford, 'How Jacques Molay Got Up the Tower: Yeats and the Irish Civil War', in *ELH*, 50:4 (Winter, 1983), 763-89, 771.

<sup>20</sup> Declan Kiberd, 'Revolt into Style-Yeatsian Poetics', in *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Vintage, 1996), 305-15, 315.

<sup>21</sup> Edward W. Said, 'Yeats and Decolonization', in *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), 265-88, 284.

<sup>22</sup> Janet Neigh, 'Reading from the Drop: Poetics of Identification and Yeats's "Leda and the Swan"', in *Journal of Modern Literature*, 29:4 (Summer, 2006), 145-60, 149,146.

<sup>23</sup> Rosenthal, *Running to Paradise: Yeats's Poetic Art*, 244.

<sup>24</sup> Howes, *Yeats's Nations: Gender, Class, and Irishness*, 120.

<sup>25</sup> Homi Bhabha, 'Editor's Introduction: Minority Maneuvers and Unsettled Negotiations', in *Critical Inquiry*, 23:3, Front Lines/Border Posts (Spring, 1997), 431-59, 447.

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<sup>26</sup> See, for instance, Jahan Ramazani, 'Is Yeats a Postcolonial Poet?', in ed., David Pierce *W.B. Yeats Critical Assessments*, vol. 3 (Mountfield, East Sussex: Helm Information Ltd, 2000), 794-813. Rached Khalifa, 'W.B. Yeats: Theorizing the Irish Nation', in ed., Deborah Fleming, *Yeats and Postcolonialism* (West Cornwall, CT: Locus Hill, 2001), 277-99. See also Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Vintage, 1996).

<sup>27</sup> Jahan Ramazani, 'Is Yeats a Postcolonial Poet?' in *W.B. Yeats Critical Assessments*, vol. 3, 794-813, 807.

<sup>28</sup> Reid, *William Butler Yeats: The Lyric of Tragedy*, 96.

<sup>29</sup> Stanfield, *Yeats and Politics in the 1930s*, 15.

<sup>30</sup> Vincent Adams, 'Reasons for Sailing: Traces of Artifice and its Use in "Among School Children" and "Meditations in Time of Civil War"',

<http://writing.colostate.edu/gallery/phantasmagoria/adams.htm>

<sup>31</sup> Doggett, *Deep-Rooted Things*, 81-82.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>33</sup> Alex Zwerdling, *Yeats and the Heroic Ideal* (London: Peter Owen, 1966), 96-7.

<sup>34</sup> Richard Gill, *Happy Rural Seat: The English Country House and the Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972), 170.

<sup>35</sup> Stan Smith, *W. B. Yeats: A Critical Introduction* (London: Macmillan, 1990), 64-5.

<sup>36</sup> Edward Larrissy, *W. B. Yeats* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1998), 57.

<sup>37</sup> Doggett, *Deep-Rooted Things*, 85.

<sup>38</sup> Ursula Bridge, ed., *W. B. Yeats and T. Sturge Moore: Their Correspondence, 1901-1937* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953), 114.

<sup>39</sup> John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 71-2.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Hone, *W. B. Yeats, 1865-1939*, 346.

<sup>41</sup> Doggett, *Deep-Rooted Things*, 86.

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- <sup>42</sup> David Lloyd, *Anomalous States, Irish Writing and the Post-colonial Moment* (Dublin: Lilliput, 1993), 79.
- <sup>43</sup> Antony Coleman, 'The Big House, Yeats, and the Irish Context', in ed., Warwick Gould, *Yeats Annual*, 3 (1985), 33-52, 44.
- <sup>44</sup> Doggett, *Deep-Rooted Things*, 88.
- <sup>45</sup> A. Norman Jeffares, *W. B. Yeats: Man and Poet*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), 230.
- <sup>46</sup> Torchiana, *W. B. Yeats & Georgian Ireland*, 315.
- <sup>47</sup> Cullingford, 'How Jacques Molay Got Up the Tower: Yeats and the Irish Civil War', 763-789.
- <sup>48</sup> Quoted in Elizabeth Cullingford, *Yeats, Ireland and Fascism* (London: Macmillan, 1981), 112.
- <sup>49</sup> Cullingford, 'How Jacques Molay Got Up the Tower: Yeats and the Irish Civil War', 766.
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 786.
- <sup>51</sup> Richard Ellmann, *The Identity of Yeats* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), 247.
- <sup>52</sup> Jeffares, *W. B. Yeats: Man and Poet*, 229.
- <sup>53</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 128.
- <sup>54</sup> Stan Smith, *W.B. Yeats: A Critical Introduction*, 42-43.
- <sup>55</sup> Michael Trantner, *Modernism and Mass Politics: Joyce, Woolf, Elliot, Yeats* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 152.
- <sup>56</sup> Wolfgang Wight, 'Afterword to Autobiographien', in *W. B. Yeats Critical Assessments*, vol. 4, 188-200, 193.
- <sup>57</sup> Stanfield, *Yeats and Politics in the 1930s*, 67-8.
- <sup>58</sup> Howes, *Yeats's Nations: Gender, Class, and Irishness*, 118.
- <sup>59</sup> Augustine Martin, 'What Stalked through the Post Office? (Reply to Seamus Deane)', in ed., Jonathan Allison, *Yeats's Political Identities: Selected Essays* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press), 261-78, 267.

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<sup>60</sup> Doggett, *Deep-Rooted Things*, 71-72.

<sup>61</sup> A. Norman Jeffares, *W.B. Yeats: A New Biography* (London: Continuum, 2001), 209.

<sup>62</sup> R. F. Foster, 'Yeats at War: Poetic Strategies and Political Reconstruction from the Easter Rising to the Free State: The Prothero Lecture', in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th Ser., vol. 11 (2001), 125-145, 143,142.

<sup>63</sup> Jeffares, *W.B. Yeats*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), 84.

<sup>64</sup> A. Norman Jeffares, *W. B. Yeats*, 84, Cullingford, *Yeats, Ireland and Fascism*, 118.

<sup>65</sup> Quoted in Cullingford, *Yeats, Ireland and Fascism*, 108-09.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>67</sup> Robert Mohr, 'Politics Wrought to Its Uttermost', in eds., Peter Liebrechts and Peter van de Kamp, *Tumult of Images: Essays on W.B. Yeats and Politics* (Amsterdam-Atlanta: Radopi, 1995), 223-45, 239.

<sup>68</sup> John Unterecker, *A Reader's Guide to William Butler Yeats* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1959), 183.

<sup>69</sup> A. Norman Jeffares, *A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W B. Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1968), 279.

<sup>70</sup> Doggett, *Deep-Rooted Things*, 81. Smith, *W.B. Yeats: A Critical Introduction*, 97.

<sup>71</sup> Seamus Deane, *A Short History of Irish Literature* (London: Heinemann, 1986), 158.

<sup>72</sup> Quoted in Cullingford, *Yeats, Ireland and Fascism*, 104.

<sup>73</sup> W. J. T. Mitchell, 'Translator translated (interview with cultural theorist Homi Bhabha)', in *Artforum*, 33:7 (March 1995), 80-84.

<sup>74</sup> George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (London: Martin Secker & Warburg, 1949), 220.

## COLONIALIST REACTIONARY OR POSTCOLONIAL ARTIST? THE DOUBLE PICTURE OF THE OLD POET

### LATE PREOCCUPATIONS

Yeats was prolific during his final years, publishing poetry, plays, and prose. In fact one finds an evident surge of creative activity in the late Yeats; as T.R. Henn asserts, there is 'no precedent in literary history for a poet who produces his greatest work between the ages of 50 and 75'.<sup>1</sup> *The Tower* and *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*, two of his best collections of poems, were published in 1928 and 1933, followed by *Parnell's Funeral and Other Poems* (1935), *New Poems* (1938), and *Last Poems* (1939). His complex philosophical book, *A Vision*, was first published in 1925; a second and more complete edition followed in 1937. Some of his finest dramatic works were staged during these years, plays such as *Fighting the Waves* (1929), *The Words upon the Window-Pane* (1930), and *The King of the Great Clock Tower* (1934), *The Herne's Egg* (1938), and *The Death of Cuchulain* (1939). In addition to creating his own oeuvre, Yeats was productive in other literary fields as well. Thus from 1935 to 1937 he collaborated with his Indian mystic friend, Shri Purhoit Swami, on a translation of *The Ten Principal Upanishads*, edited *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* in 1936, and made BBC radio broadcasts on literary themes during the 1930s. Moreover, Yeats was actively involved in Irish public life. He served as a Senator of the Irish Free State from 1922 to 1928, won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1923, continued his campaign for Irish possession of Hugh Lane's paintings in 1923 and 1926, and founded the Irish Academy of Letters and made his last American tour in 1932.

But all this fame and public presence did not place him in the expected position of venerable old poet. If anything, he seemed to become more radical, extravagant, and opposed to the norms of the society he lived in as he grew older. In fact, the picture one gets from the old poet is far from the serene, senescent, calm, and traditional old man: 'You think it horrible that Lust and Rage / Should dance attendance upon my old age; / They were not such a plague when I was young; / What else have I to spur me into song?' (*VP*, 591) His passionate though brief

attraction to fascist ideas, a rejuvenating Steinbach operation, which resulted in a renewed interest in sexual love and intimate friendship with young women such as Margot Ruddock and Ethel Mannin, a preoccupation with sex, violence and eugenics, an increase in occult activities encouraged by his wife's automatic writings, and a rather hyperbolic and glamorised exaltation of the Anglo-Irish heritage are just some examples of the various extremisms the old poet went through. As always, and even perhaps more so than in other periods of his life, the old Yeats had many themes to write about; subjects as various as sex, philosophy, violence, war, old age, death, art, mysticism, the occult, and politics were among his preoccupations at this time.

The questions of death, the journey of the soul in the afterlife, and immortality, for instance, appear time and again in his late poetry. Poems such as 'Death', 'At Algeciras-A meditation upon Death', 'Mohini Chatterjee', 'Vacillation', 'A Prayer for Old Age', and 'Under Ben Bulben', all in one way or another show the old Yeats's preoccupation with these complex issues. The doctrine of reincarnation, for example, is the theme of 'Mohini Chatterjee', a poem named after an Indian monk who actually strengthened Yeats' belief in reincarnation and the immortality of the soul. Thus the Brahmin of the poem advises the poet 'Pray for nothing, say / Every night in bed, / I have been a king, / I have been a slave, / Nor is there anything, / Fool, rascal, knave / That I have not been,' (VP, 495-96) The same belief is affirmed once more in the first two stanzas of 'Under Ben Bulben', this time not by a Buddhist but by the ancient Irish pagan faith, 'Swear by what the sages spoke / Round the Mareotic Lake / That the Witch of Atlas knew / Spoke and set the cocks a-crow. / ... / Here's the gist of what they mean. / Many times man lives and dies / Between his two eternities' (VP, 636-37). The speaker of 'Death' reflects on the duality of emotions a dying man undergoes at the moment of his death, a combination of fear and hope: 'Nor dread nor hope attend / A dying animal; / A man awaits his end / Dreading and hoping all;' (VP, 476) The poet prepares himself for an approaching death: 'No longer in Lethean foliage caught / Begin the preparation for your death', designing his grave and willing his epitaph: 'No marble, no conventional phrase; / On limestone quarried near the spot / By his command these words are cut: / *Cast a cold eye / On life, on death. / Horseman, pass by!*' (VP, 500, 640) Facing a debilitating old age and an approaching death,



Yeats is not submissive and obedient. On the contrary, he is defiant and unremitting: 'I thought it out this very day, / Noon upon the clock, / A man may put pretence away / Who leans upon a stick, / May sing, and sing until he drop, / Whether to maid or hag:'. He is passionate for life. In spite of all his sufferings, the old poet is 'content to live it all again' (*VP*, 525, 479).

Another dominant theme of the late Yeats is a growing interest in the question of sex. In a letter to Olivia Shakespeare he writes: 'My moods fill me with surprise and some alarm. The other day I found at Coole a reproduction of a drawing of two charming young persons in the full stream of their Saphoistic enthusiasm, and it got into my dreams at night and made a great racket there' (*L*, 715). This intimate confession hints at a reawakened sexual awareness. In 1934 Yeats underwent a Steinbach operation, a kind of vasectomy believed to restore sexual potency. It was also in the 1930s that he developed an intimate and close relationship with a number of young women, including Dorothy Wellesley and Ethel Mannin. Many poems from *Words for Music Perhaps*, which include the sequence of Crazy Jane poems, *A Woman Old and Young*, *Supernatural Songs*, and some poems from Yeats's last two collections *New Poems*, and *Last Poems*, are engaged with the issue of sex and celebrate sexual energy and bodily pleasure. In some of these poems, the bodily pleasure is gratified and we witness a rather unconventional (for that time) and increasing use of erotic imagery. The female persona of the Crazy Jane poems, for example, openly talks about her sexual relationship: 'Jack had my virginity / And bids me to the oak' (*VP*, 508) Explicit sexual imagery is employed in a number of poems: 'What sort of man is coming / To lie between your feet? / What matter we are but women. / Wash; make your body sweet;' or 'From pleasure of the bed, / Dull as a worm, / His rod and its butting head / limp as a worm / His spirit that has fled / Blind as a worm' (*VP*, 572, 575). In other poems sexual love is linked with divinity and is thus sanctified. In 'Crazy Jane and Jack the Journeyman', for example, sexual intercourse can help man to approach God; in 'Crazy Jane on God', the fullness of bodily love is related with the fullness of God; and finally in 'Ribh denounces Patrick' and 'Ribh in Ecstasy', natural sexual love between man and woman is linked to and associated with supernatural love: 'Natural and supernatural with the self-same ring are wed. / As man, as beast, as an ephemeral fly begets, Godhead begets Godhead' and 'My soul had found / All

Happiness in its own cause or ground. / Godhead on Godhead in sexual spasm  
begot / Godhead.' (VP, 556, 557)

In the last decade of his life most of Yeats's old friends and allies such as Lady Gregory, Synge, O'Leary, and George Russell were already dead, so an elegiac sense of the loss of these close friends and a feeling of loneliness and solitude appear time and again in his poems of these years. Poems such as 'In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markiewicz', 'Coole Park, 1929', 'Coole and Ballylee, 1931', 'Beautiful Lofty Things', and 'The Municipal Gallery Re-visited' express the poet's lament over the departure of his worthy friends, colleagues and supporters. The first poem is a nostalgic reminiscence of the young and beautiful sisters, Eva and Constance Gore-Booth, who, Yeats believed, had ruined their bright and hopeful future by a fanatic involvement in politics, thus wasting the best years of their lives by 'Conspiring among the ignorant'. At the end of the poem, there is a mild reproach in the speaker's address to the dead sisters, who, according to him now know 'All the folly of a fight / With a common wrong or right'. The prevalent tone of the final lines, though, implies Yeats's deep sorrow for the loss of those once young and beautiful friends: 'The innocent and the beautiful / Have no enemy but time; / Arise and bid me strike a match / And strike another till time catch; / Should the conflagration climb, / Run till all the sages know / We the great gazebo built / They convicted us of guilt / Bid me strike a match and blow' (VP, 475, 476). If there is a mild disapproval of and regret at the Gore-Booth's political involvements in this poem, in the other poems written to commemorate his friends, there is nothing but praise and approval of what they did. In fact the poet boasts that his friends possessed personal characteristics and qualities which make an 'excellent company' (VP, 489). They are like the ancient gods and goddesses, the like of which will never come into existence: 'All the Olympians; a thing never known again' (VP, 578). He is proud to have had such great men and women as his friends, who represented Ireland at her best, and he asks his readers to credit him for having such great friends: 'You that would judge me, do not judge alone / This book or that, come to this hallowed place / Where my friends' portraits hang and look thereon; / Ireland's history in their lineaments trace; / Think where man's glory most begins and ends, / And say my glory was that I had such friends' (VP, 603-04).

Yeats's praise for what he considered as the glamorous eighteenth century Anglo-Irish tradition reached its peak in the last decade of his life. Feeling isolated in a predominantly Catholic Ireland, and embittered by the restricting measures of the Free State government, which, perhaps naturally, tended to rule the country according to Catholic principles, the old Anglo-Irish poet sought refuge in a rather hyperbolic glorification of the Anglo-Irish heritage. Thus in many of his last poems he regrets the disappearance of what he considered as the true and the high culture, embodied in big houses of the Anglo-Irish such as that of Lady Gregory, a culture which, Yeats believed, could save modern Ireland. In both 'Coole Park, 1929' and 'Coole and Ballyle, 1931', Yeats glorifies certain specific values such as generous patronage for art, refinement of taste, and freedom of spirit, which he attributes to the inhabitants of that house, particularly its owner, Lady Gregory. In a number of other poems, such as 'Blood and Moon', 'The Seven Sages', 'Parnell's Funeral', and 'Come Gather Round Me Parnellites', the men who contributed to the Anglo-Irish heritage, Goldsmith, Swift, Berkeley, Burke, and Parnell are praised for the nobility of their characters and the loftiness of their ideas. Emphasising the connection between his beliefs and those of his predecessors, Yeats identifies himself with these men, who, for him, represented Protestant Ireland at her best: 'I declare this tower is my symbol; I declare / This winding, gyring, spiring treadmill of a stair is my ancestral stair; / That Goldsmith and the Dean, Berkeley and Burke have travelled there' (*VP*, 480-81).<sup>2</sup> Yeats went so far as to claim his heroes as the true embodiment and spirit of Ireland: 'Berkeley, Swift, Burke, Grattan, Parnell, Augusta Gregory, Synge, Kevin O'Higgins, are the true Irish people, and there is nothing too hard for such as these' (*Ex*, 442).

Yeats's inclination towards the occult, mysticism, and the supernatural continued well up to the end of his life and provided much of the basis for his late poetry. In fact in the late Yeats, we witness a surge in his involvement with both Western and Eastern mystic philosophies. Yeats's vast knowledge of the occult, his familiarity with Neo-Platonic tradition, Indian mysticism, Japanese Zen Buddhism, extensive reading of, among others, Swedenborg, Jacob Boehme, Spinoza, Daisetz Suzuki and Rabindranath Tagore, his personal acquaintance with Indian mystics such as Mohini Chatterji and Shri Purhoit Swami, and finally the mutual séances and

automatic writings he experienced with his wife, all helped and influenced his writings. Out of these various sources his monumental book about the complex cyclical theory of historical eras, civilizations, and human personalities, *A Vision*, came into being. This vast body of knowledge was also reflected in a number of his poems such as 'A Dialogue of Self and Soul', 'Byzantium', 'Vacillation', 'Chosen', *Supernatural Songs*, and 'Lapis Lazuli'.

## LATE YEATS AND POLITICS

All the above-mentioned preoccupations and concerns did not mean that the late Yeats was not concerned with and did not write about politics. In spite of his proclaimed distance from political issues expressed in his letters such as 'No more opinions, no more politics, no more practical tasks', or 'My dear Ethel, Here is an anonymous subscription for your labour poor-box- not for politics- I am finished with that for ever', the last ten years of his life were heavily entwined with Irish and world political events (*L*, 761, 884). In fact in some of his letters, this pull towards politics is quite obvious: 'Politics are growing heroic. De Valera has forced political thought to face the most fundamental issues'. With reference to *On the Boiler* he wrote: 'For the first time I am saying what I believe about Irish and European politics' (*L*, 811, 910).

Over the years Yeats's political views and inclinations have been well explored and broadly discussed by a considerable number of critics.<sup>3</sup> There has, however, been much debate and little agreement as to the nature of his late political beliefs and ideas. His late political views and stances have received unfavourable responses from a group of critics. In general, from the bulk of the late Yeats criticism two main pictures emerge: Yeats the classical liberal and defender of civil liberties, and Yeats the reactionary conservative and propagandist of authoritarian government. A number of critics have criticized and disparaged the reactionary and authoritarian attitudes of the late Yeats. Conor Cruise O'Brien's presentation of Yeats as an opportunistic and sporadic nationalist who in his later years became actively and ardently a supporter of fascism was the first major, influential, and unrelenting critique of Yeats's political ideology.<sup>4</sup> O'Brien could be regarded as a characteristic example of those critics who disparage Yeats for his authoritarian

and retrogressive beliefs. Years later Seamus Deane would give a more dramatic and grotesque view of the late Yeats's work: 'I can't breathe the rarefied air of the late poems and plays without an oxygen mask: it's an air made for the tear gas of street riots and the lethal gas of authoritarian concentration'.<sup>5</sup> While admiring the power of Yeats' poetry David Lloyd cannot help reproving the poet's political beliefs which, he argues, display a kind of 'avowed authoritarianism, if not downright fascist sympathies'.<sup>6</sup>

On the other side, there are critics who have tried, in different ways, to somehow explain away Yeats's embrace of violence and his association with fascism and to present him as a defender of individual liberties. In perhaps the most comprehensive response to O'Brien's indictment of Yeats, Elizabeth Cullingford sets out to depict Yeats as a nationalist in the school of John O'Leary. Arguing that O'Leary's nationalism cared more for the freedom of the individual rather than the good of society, she concludes:

O'Leary's refusal to admit that the cause might be greater than the man helped Yeats towards his rejection of both fascism and communism, as ideologies which subordinated the citizen to the State or to the Party. After the Blueshirt episode Yeats lost interest in the idea of the State, and reasserted his faith in the qualities of individual men.<sup>7</sup>

Bernard Benstock emphasizes the brevity of Yeats's involvement with fascism and asserts: 'If Stephen Spender can be exonerated for a week in the Communist Party, one presumes that Yeats can be forgiven his 'less than a year''.<sup>8</sup> And Donald Torchiana points to another aspect of the late Yeats, his defence of civil liberties: 'Yeats's defence of civil liberties, like Swift's, is legendary in Ireland ... Where civil liberties were concerned, no official was safe from Yeats's wrath'.<sup>9</sup>

In fact one can find evidence in the work of the late Yeats to support either of these opposed views of the poet. It is the very presence of opposing views and conflicting visions that makes it difficult, if not impossible, to portray him once and for all as either an anti-colonial poet of liberation and individualism or as an anti-democratic and reactionary poet with a colonial mentality. It was always Yeats's habit to think in polarities, constantly to fluctuate between contradictory

positions. On the one hand we have a poet who spoke for toleration, equal social rights and freedom for all, and attacked the postcolonial government whenever he felt these values were threatened. On the other hand he supported the idea of an authoritarian and anti-democratic government and a hierarchical society and expressed reactionary views on how these should come into being. His vacillating attitudes have thus contributed to a double evaluation of his work. Yet, to adopt a one-sided view of the old Yeats, either seeing him as an archetypal reactionary or a champion of individual liberties is to ignore the complexity of his late thought, and the heterogeneity of voices that thought contains. My main contention is that to take side with either side of the above-mentioned critics is to present an incomplete picture of a complex man.

In this chapter I am not going to try to establish whether the late Yeats was a reactionary snob who really believed in Fascism and in an authoritative form of government or whether he was a postcolonial artist who criticised the shortcomings of the newly-found Irish government and championed individual freedoms. Depending on the texts one chooses to concentrate on, one can reach either of these two conclusions about the old poet's late politics. In the case of such a vacillating and complex poet as Yeats, however, it is more fruitful to foreground the questions of change, uncertainty and circularity inherent in his views. What I am going to argue for in this chapter is the need to recognise the fluidity and the shifting nature of the late Yeats's political attitudes. In other words, I am concentrating here on the ambiguities and tensions evidenced in his late writings. The doubled attitudes Yeats displayed in his final years might then be interpreted as a last sign of his hybrid colonial status. While the main primary texts discussed in this chapter are Yeats's senate speeches and his miscellaneous work 'On the Boiler', I will also bring examples from his late poetry such as 'Blood and the Moon', and 'Parnell's Funeral'. As with the previous chapters, Yeats's letters and his prose writings are referred to whenever necessary.

Oliver Gogarty's claim that 'if it had not been for W.B. Yeats there would be no Irish Free State!' sounds like an obvious exaggeration, yet Yeats had somehow contributed to the emergence of the partially post-colonial Irish Free State, which came into being on December 6, 1922, after negotiations between the British Prime

Minster, David Lloyd George, and Arthur Griffith, the head of the Irish delegation (SS, 15). These negotiations resulted in a treaty with England according to which Ireland gained a dominion state. The new Irish Free State comprised twenty-six counties, excluding the six northern counties, and William Cosgrave became its first president.<sup>10</sup> For two terms Yeats served as a senator of this newly-founded Irish government. However, whenever the new government started to curtail civil liberties by imposing restrictive laws, he did not hesitate to voice his concerns about, criticisms of, and embittered engagement with these policies time and again. A case in point is his famous senate speech about the debate on divorce, where he called it 'tragic that within three years of this country gaining its independence we should be discussing a measure which a minority of this nation considers to be grossly oppressive' (SS, 99). In the same passionate speech Yeats stressed that outlawing divorce would alienate Protestants and in the long turn would postpone, or make impossible, any hope of having a unified Ireland:

It is perhaps the deepest political passion with this nation that North and South be united into one nation. If it ever comes that North and South unite, the North will not give up any liberty which she already possesses under her constitution. You will then have to grant to another people what you refuse to grant to those within your borders. If you show that this country, Southern Ireland, is going to be governed by Catholic ideas and by Catholic ideas alone, you will never get the North. You will create an impassable barrier between South and North, and you will pass more and more Catholic laws, while the North will, gradually, assimilate its divorce and other laws to those of England. You will put a wedge into the midst of this nation (SS, 92).

In an undelivered version of the divorce speech he was still more vehement and emphatic in defence of tolerance and freedom:

For the last hundred years Irish nationalism has had to fight against England, and that fight has helped fanaticism, for we had to welcome everything that gave Ireland emotional energy, and had little use for intelligence so far as the mass of the people were concerned, for we had to hurl them against an alien power. The basis of Irish nationalism has now shifted, and much that once helped us is now injurious, for we can no longer do anything by fighting, we must persuade, and to persuade we must become a modern, tolerant, liberal nation. I want everything discussed, I want to get rid of the old exaggerated tact and caution (SS, 159).

In 1929 the Free State decided to exert its control over the publication of books by censoring what was deemed inappropriate and immoral. Yeats had retired from the

Senate a few days before the debate on the Censorship of Publication Bill. Yet he sent an article to *The Spectator* to express his views. After explaining the dangers of such a confining legislation and its grave outcomes for Ireland, Yeats emphasised that ‘no Government has the right, whether to flatter fanatics or in mere vagueness of mind to forge an instrument of tyranny and say that it will never be used’ (SS, 177). In other similar cases, he objected to increasing the powers of the police to enter homes without warrant; opposed the censorship of films bill, supported the official inspections of Irish prisons to ensure that political prisoners were being fairly treated; and demanded the rights of women to enter the civil service. In all these instances, Yeats’s foremost emphasis was on the individual’s rights and on the government’s duty to respect and ensure these rights. In the case of prisoners, for example, he stressed that ‘no body of men could be trusted with a responsible power over any body of men, especially if these men are their political opponents, and I think that some kind of independent inspection and independent appeal ought to be allowed’ (SS, 55). It was not only in his Senate speeches that Yeats championed freedom and called for tolerance. When the nationalists demanded the destruction of Nelson’s pillar in Dublin because of its associations with the British rule over their country, Yeats was quick to respond: ‘Nelson’s Pillar should not be broken up. It represented the feeling of Protestant Ireland for a man who helped to break the power of Napoleon. The life and work of the people who erected it is part of our tradition. I think we should accept the whole past of this nation and not pick and choose’.<sup>11</sup>

The concept of a rural Catholic Gaelic Ireland as the true Ireland was to become the Irish Free State’s dominant policy especially under Eamon de Valera’s leadership, who came to power in 1932 as Ireland prime minister. Gregory Castle has referred to the ‘Catholic confessional state that Ireland had become after Eamon de Valera’s rise to power in the 1930s’, and Roy Foster, in turn, has pointed out how ‘a powerful Catholic ethos’ became the underlying point of departure for the Irish government during 1930s.<sup>12</sup> Such an essentialist political policy would have naturally excluded those who did not fit within this definition, such as communists, freethinkers, and the Anglo-Irish, the minority to which Yeats himself belonged. To accept the whole past of Ireland would have meant accepting the heterogeneity of its people. In other words, it would have implied



accommodating different Irish traditions and histories such as Protestant and Catholic, Gaelic and Anglo-Irish, colonial and anti-colonial, nationalist and unionist. Both colonialist and nationalist discourses subscribe to and propagate a monolithic view of identity by recognizing just one side of such binaries and denying the other side. A truly postcolonial discourse, however, does not favour either side of these colonial/anti-colonial categorizations; rather by breaking free from the overused binaries of the (anti)colonial discourse, it calls for embracing the concept of hybridity in defining identity. Yeats's remarks here that 'we should accept the whole past of this nation and not pick and choose' calls for recognition of the hybrid nature of the Irish people. This, in addition to his opposition to the freedom-restricting policies of the Irish Free State and his call for justice, liberty, and the protection of religious, social, artistic and political rights minorities, could qualify him as a true postcolonial artist.

Yeats's disapproval and criticism of the new postcolonial Ireland and its government was expressed time and again in a number of his late poems. In several of these poems he questions the efficiency and the merit of contemporary politicians. In 'Blood and the Moon', for example, the poet who has taken refuge in his lonely tower, a symbol of his own loneliness and also his art, declares that 'In mockery I have set / A powerful emblem up, / And sing it rhyme upon rhyme / In mockery of a time / Half dead at the top' (*VP*, 480). Those people who are at the top of his country, its political leaders, are half-dead, and do not deserve to rule the country. The list of names in the second long stanza represents the poet's ideal men, Goldsmith, Swift, Berkeley and Burke, to whom the present leaders of Ireland should look. However, the repetition of the tower image with an empty head in the final stanza, suggests that there is a great difference between the great men of the past and modern Irish politicians: 'Is every modern nation like the tower / Half dead at the top?' (*VP*, 482)<sup>13</sup> In 'Parnell's Funeral', the poet contrasts the politicians of the Irish Free State including its two consecutive presidents, William Cosgrave and Eamon de Valera with Charles Stewart Parnell, a protestant political leader and opponent of Home Rule in the 1880s whom Yeats admired much. The present leaders lack the insight and the courage of Parnell who 'fought the might of England / And saved the Irish poor,' (*VP*, 586) This lack of audacity, according to the poet, is the reason behind Ireland's political troubles, 'Had de

Valéra eaten Parnell's heart / No loose-lipped demagogue had won the day, / No civil rancour torn the land apart. / Had Cosgrave eaten Parnell's heart, the land's / Imagination had been satisfied, / Or lacking that, government in such hands, / O'Higgins its sole statesman had not died' (*VP*, 542-43).

Some other poems question the claims of the revolutionary nationalists who promise a utopian society after the colonizer has withdrawn and independence and freedom is achieved by the colonized. Among these we can mention three short consecutive poems in *New Poems*, beginning with 'The Great Day', with its ironic title and tone: 'Hurrah for revolution and more cannon shot! / A beggar upon horseback lashes a beggar upon foot. / Hurrah for revolution and cannon come again! / The beggars have changed places, but the lash goes on' (*VP*, 590) The postcolonial government seems to be merely a repetition of the colonial one; nothing has been changed unless it be the place of the beggars. As Yeats wrote in 1937: 'The fate of all successful revolutions is to become the next orthodoxy' (*L*, 897). In 'What Was Lost', the speaker voices his discontent regarding what has become of his country and what it has gained: 'I sing what was lost and dread what was won,' he declares, and in another short poem, 'Parnell', he expresses the same pessimistic mood: 'Parnell came down the road, he said to a cheering man: / 'Ireland shall get her freedom and you still break stone'' (*VP*, 591, 590).

According to Jahan Ramazani 'writers widely recognized as postcolonial, from Fanon and Naipaul to Femi Osofisan, have written vehemently against the postcolonial state or have stood outside the mainstream of indigenous opinion'.<sup>14</sup> Yeats's views in some of his late poetry mirror these postcolonial artists' severe disapproval, disparagement, and criticism of the nationalist governments of the once-colonized countries. Moreover, these poems anticipate anti-colonial thinkers such as Frantz Fanon, who believed that formal independence and decolonization does not necessarily bring about freedom, justice and equality.<sup>15</sup> There is also a link between such pessimistic political views and the late Yeats's extremism. As he confessed to Ethel Mannin in 1936: 'Certain things drive me mad and I lose control of my tongue' (*L*, 872).

However, if the late Yeats's defence of civil liberties and his call for tolerance of the other, which were repeated time and again during his Senate period, and his dissatisfaction with the newly-founded Irish Free State reflects a positive and laudatory picture of the old poet, there is a quite opposite side to him as well, an authoritarian, eugenicist, violence-preaching and war-mongering side. These shocking characteristics appear time and again in some of Yeats's late poetry such as 'Blood and the Moon' and 'Under Ben Bulbin', and they reach their zenith in his miscellany *On the Boiler*. The third part of 'Blood and the Moon', for example, is replete with horrific images of violence and bloodshed, 'The blood of innocence has left no stain. / There, on blood-saturated ground, have stood / Soldier, assassin, executioner, / Whether for daily pittance or in blind fear / Or out of abstract hatred, and shed blood, / But could not cast a single jet thereon. / Odour of blood on the ancestral stair!' The poet's description of a violent and atrocious past does not convey detachment or disgust on his part. If anything, those who have shed blood are seen as commanding and determined men in comparison to their descendants: 'And we that have shed none must gather there / And clamour in drunken frenzy for the moon' (*VP*, 482). As Daniel Albright has aptly noted, these lines depict modern men as 'insufficiently bloody and insufficiently lunar – neither powerful nor wise'.<sup>16</sup>

The Late Yeats's ideal form of government was an authoritative government in which the educated and elite few were the rulers: 'I find myself constantly urging the despotic rule of the educated classes as the only end to our troubles' (*L*, 811-12). He was vehemently against democracy and in fact against any form of government which relies on the mass of people for its support. His anti-democratic sentiments were articulated both in his poetry and his prose. In 'Church and State', for example, the poet disparages both these highest religious and political foundations for their reliance on and association with people, 'Might of the church and the State, / Their mobs put under their feet. / ... / What if the Church and the State / Are the mob that howls at the door!' (*VP*, 554) An anticipation of and a wishful belief in the death of democracy appears time and again in Yeats's late writings. In his letters, for example, he stresses his hatred for democracy and declares its death. 'Democracy is dead and force claims its ancient right', reads a letter to Olivia Shakespear, and in another letter he writes: 'Italy, Poland,

Germany, then perhaps Ireland. Doubtless I shall hate it (though not so much as I hate Irish democracy)' (*L*, 695, 813). One of the basic tenets of *A Vision*, a book which expounds Yeats's esoteric thoughts on how life and the universe work, is that civilizations are replaced with their opposites after a period of two thousand years: 'After an age of necessity, truth, goodness, mechanism, science, democracy, abstraction, peace, comes an age of freedom, fiction, evil, kindred, art, aristocracy, particularity, war' (*AV*, 52). In 'From Democracy to Authority' he welcomes the arrival of an anti-democratic government: 'Authoritative government is certainly coming, if for no other reason than that the modern State is so complex that it must find some kind of expert government, a government firm enough, tyrannical enough, if you will, to spend years in carrying out its plans' (*UP II*, 433).

Another aspect of the late Yeats's reactionary politics is his belief in and support for eugenics.<sup>17</sup> He believed in the physical and the mental decline of the European race in general and the Irish people in particular, and he considered the then new science of eugenics, which was based on selective and controlled breeding, as the solution to this growing problem. Marjorie Howes notes that Yeats 'saw in eugenics a confirmation of his convictions that the protection of an aristocratic leisured class of "the best born of the best" was a crucial necessity for Ireland'.<sup>18</sup> Paul Scott Stanfield has also argued that questions such as the gradual predominance of baser races over the nobler ones, was a main theme as early as 1903-04 when Yeats wrote *On Baile's Strand* and *The King's Threshold*. According to Stanfield, in these two works 'questions of heredity and generation do more than appear briefly and implicitly. They bear the main burdens of the plays'.<sup>19</sup> In fact one can go further back and find elements of Yeats's concern with the questions of purity of race and blood in the Introductory Rhymes to *Responsibilities* when the middle-aged poet is justifying the nobility of his ancestors: 'Merchant and scholar who have left me blood / That has not passed through any huckster's loin,' (*VP*, 269). However, Yeats's preoccupation with the decline of the world and degeneration increased in his late career and was given a fuller expression in some of his late poetry. In 'A Bronze Head', for example, the poet, through the eyes of Maud Gonne's bust looks 'On this foul world in its decline and fall / On gangling stocks grown great, great stocks run dry,' (*VP*, 619) In 'The Statues' he laments the fate of 'We Irish, born into that ancient sect / But

thrown upon this filthy modern tide' and in 'Under Ben Bulbin' Irish poets are urged to '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' (*VP*, 611, 639).

If there are outbursts of Yeats's praise for authoritative government, violence, war, and eugenics in Yeats's late poetry and prose, there is evidently no better place than *On the Boiler* and the short play it contains (*Purgatory*) to observe his reactionary attitudes being given their fullest manifestation. As if aware of the quite unorthodox and shocking effect of his views in this miscellany, Yeats wrote to Dorothy Wellesley: 'I am writing my *Fors Clavigera*; for the first time in my life I am saying what are my political beliefs. You will not quarrel with them, but I shall lose friends if I am able to get on paper the passion that is in my head. I shall go on to poetry and the arts, and shall not be less inimical to contemporary taste', and to Ethel Mannin: 'I must lay aside the pleasant paths I have built up for years and seek the brutality, the ill breeding, the barbarism of truth. Pray for me, my dear, I want an atheist's prayers, no Christian can do me any good' (*L*, 902, 903). With its grim and shocking depiction of the war between the educated class and the masses, its praise of warfare and destruction, its call for violence, and its support for eugenic measures to shape the future generations, 'On the Boiler' is the epitome of the late Yeats's reactionary politics.

From the outset the writer states his anti-democratic convictions as to the form of his ideal government: 'The whole State should be so constructed that the people should think it their duty to grow popular with King and Lord Mayor instead of King and Lord Mayor growing popular with them'. Yeats believed that a government should include educated and able men, not common representative men. Criticising the present political state in Ireland, he attributes it to the elective system, which according to him, puts the wrong people in power:

Our representative system has given Ireland to the incompetent ... In its early days some old banker or lawyer would dominate the House, leaning upon the back of the chair in front, always speaking with undisturbed self-possession as at some table in a board-room. My imagination sets up against him some typical elected man, emotional as a youthful chimpanzee, hot and vague, always disturbed, always hating something or other (*Ex*, 412, 413).

Comparing an elected member of the parliament to a ‘youthful chimpanzee, hot and vague’, reminds one of the demeaning stereotypes used by the colonizer to describe the colonized. Prevalent colonialist stereotypes in Victorian journals depicted the Irish as violent, barbaric and at the same time comic creatures. A number of critics have pointed to the dehumanized representations of the Irish by their neighbouring colonizers during mid and late Victorian and early modern eras.<sup>20</sup> Lewis Perry Curtis, for example, notes that the portrayal of the Irish as ‘dangerous ape-man or simianized agitator reflected a significant shift in the attitudes of some Victorians about the differences between not only Englishmen and Irishmen, but also between human beings and apes’.<sup>21</sup> Yeats’s denigrating description of the young Irish MP has much in common with the language of the English colonizer. In another instance, the same clichéd view of the Irish is repeated. This time they are compared to the English and are believed to be ‘nearer than the English to the Mythic Age’. Yeats then recounts a personal experience to elaborate and support his point:

Once, coming up from Cork, I got into talk with a fellow-traveller and learned that he lived in County Cork, and as there was nothing noticeable about his accent I assumed that he was a Cork man. Presently he said, ‘We have passed through three climates since we started; first our breath congealed on the glass, and then it ceased to do so, and now it congeals again’, I said, ‘You are English?’ He said, ‘Yes, but how did you find out?’ I said, ‘No Irishman would have made that observation’ (*Ex*, 427, 428).

In both examples Yeats is rewriting a colonialist language. The implied conclusion of such a view of the Irish is more compliant with the colonialist belief that the colonized are backward and not sufficiently mentally mature to govern themselves, a belief resulting in the view that they should be ruled by the wise and observant colonizer. In other words, Yeats is here subscribing to the racial and colonialist stereotypical representation of the native colonized as child-like and underdeveloped creatures.

The second part of *On the Boiler*, ‘Tomorrow’s Revolution’, warns the readers against the menace of physical and mental degeneration, which, according to the writer, is evident and prevalent everywhere: ‘Since about 1900 the better stocks have not been replacing their numbers, while the stupider and less healthy have

been more than replacing theirs. Unless there is a change in the public mind every rank above the lowest must degenerate, and as inferior men push up into its gaps, degenerate more and more quickly'. This degeneration is caused and accelerated because governments encourage families to have more children so that they can have bigger armies. Other reasons include, 'giving way for all to marry that will, too much liberty and indulgence in tolerating all sorts' (*Ex*, 423, 419). The question of making the right choice in marriage is one of the central themes of the short play *Purgatory*, which is included in *On the Boiler*. In that play, the old man's mother, an aristocratic girl has made the wrong choice by making love to 'a groom in a training stable', a lower-class drunkard (*VPL*, 1043). She has thus polluted the family line by marrying below herself. The unworthy husband has ruined his family's values and wealth through his drunkenness and irresponsibility. The old man, who is now a pedlar, confesses to his now sixteen-year old son that he has stabbed his father to death and set their house on fire to revenge his mother's ill-advised marriage. At the end of the play he kills his bastard son as well to stop the pollution from passing on and release his mother's soul from enacting her painful past life. And yet, he cannot help anything: 'Twice a murderer and all for nothing / and she must animate that dead night / Not once but many times!' (*VPL*, 1049) The solution offered and carried out by the old man in *Purgatory* to end the deterioration of his descendants is what *On the Boiler* proposes to prevent the degeneration of mankind: that is, physical elimination of the uneducated masses. A war waged by the elite is deemed to be the only way to stop the growing decay of society: 'The drilled and docile masses may submit, but a prolonged civil war seems more likely, with the victory of the skilful, riding their machines as did the feudal knights their armoured horses'. Unless such liquidation through war is achieved, 'the European civilisation, like those older civilisations that saw the triumph of their general stocks, will accept decay' (*Ex*, 425).

The remaining parts of the *On the Boiler* repeat the arguments and the convictions of the first two sections. For example 'Private Thoughts' depicts a chillingly alarming description of modern society: 'As we approach the phoenix' nest the old classes, with their power of co-ordinating events, evaporate, the mere multitude is everywhere with its empty photographic eyes', and presents eugenics as the only hope to regain what he considers as the ideal society when 'the best bred from the

best shall claim again their ancient omens' (*Ex*, 434, 437). In 'Ireland After Revolution' Yeats regards violence as a necessary and justifiable means to control society: 'If human violence is not embodied in our institutions the young will not give them their affection, nor the young and old their loyalty. A government is legitimate because some instinct has compelled us to give it the right to take life in defence of its laws and its shores' (*Ex*, 441).

Spurgeon Thompson has proposed that '*On the Boiler* is a tract about nothing other than a colonialist anxiety about the state'.<sup>22</sup> One tends to agree with Thompson's conclusion, but can one apply and extend this conclusion as a general rule to the late Yeats? Certainly in his enthusiastic and passionate praise of violence and war, and in his enthusiastic support and wishful waiting for an authoritarian and hierarchical government, which were expressed time and again in his late work, we can find enough support for such a deduction, which regards Yeats as a poet with colonialist inclinations and mentalities. But on the other hand we have the late Yeats' humane and fierce defence of civil liberties and individuals' rights, or his severe criticism of the Irish postcolonial government for not observing these rights and freedoms, which can be evidenced to present him as a postcolonial figure. What are the implications of such opposite views and stances in the late Yeats's career for his position as a colonial/postcolonial writer? One implication is that we cannot pigeonhole a complex and multi-sided character, who was capable of exposing changing, dual, and often conflicting attitudes, once and for all by any fixed epithet. The multiple and contradictory views Yeats took during the last years of his life should caution us against any attempt to ascribe a fixed identity to him. Another implication is that in dealing with the issue of Yeats's colonial status we should foreground the concepts of fluidity, complexity, ambivalence, and hybridity.

## CONCLUSION

A number of critics have pointed out the duality of the late Yeats's attitudes. Margaret Mills Harper rightly emphasizes in her insightful essay 'Twilight to Vision: Yeats's Collaborative Modernity', that Yeats's late work 'especially



implies varying relations between separate modes or attitudes more typically than it offers singleness or unity. In rhetorical stances, complexes of images, and deep structure, in single works and implicit or explicit connection between them, Yeats shows disagreement, polar opposition, contrast, disjunction ...'<sup>23</sup> Edward Larrisy also asserts that 'Yeats's late phase is characterised by the merging of opposite principles, the loosening of the firm boundaries that had been drawn between them, and the acceptance of brokenness'.<sup>24</sup> In fact Yeats's own confession to Dorothy Wellesley in 1937 that 'I begin to see things double-doubled in history, world history, personal history' should make readers aware of an internal division in his character (*L*, 887). Moreover, it should warn us against any criticism which ignores this doubleness and admits of no reservations or complications.

Obviously if we consider what Yeats wrote and said during the last decade of his life in its totality, a strange, mixed picture emerges. On the one side we have a man who calls for freedom, toleration, and individuals' rights; on the other we see a poet who calls for authority, violence, and war. To put this in colonial terms, the late Yeats can be either described as a postcolonial poet or a poet with colonialist mentalities. One can see the issue from a chronological point of view and conclude that because the freedom-preaching senator Yeats precedes the authoritative Yeats of *On the Boiler* and such poems as 'Under Ben Bulbin', so the latter is what the old Yeats really was and believed in. However, this is to proceed with a false assumption, which presupposes a fixed and stable identity for a writer whose work was full of contraries and dualities. Two years before the publication of *On the Boiler*, Yeats wrote in a letter to Ethel Mannin, 'as my sense of reality deepens, and I think it does with age, my horror at the cruelty of governments grows greater ... I am not callous, every nerve trembles with horror at what is happening in Europe' (*L*, 851). How can the writer of these lines write poetry and prose which encourages violence and war? Yet he *did* write such poetry and prose.

Up to the end of his life Yeats was uncertain, doubtful and uncomfortable about the implications of his involvement in Irish political life. In 'Vacillation', for example, the old poet ponders how 'Things said or done long years ago, / Or things I did not do or say / But thought that I might say or do, / Weigh me down, and not a day / But something is recalled, / My conscience or my vanity appalled' (*VP*, 501).

Another poem, 'The Man and the Echo', in turn, reflects this sense of unease and self-interrogation more specifically, 'All that I have said and done, / Now that I am old and ill, / Turns into a question till / I lie awake night after night / And never get the answers right. / Did that play of mine send out / Certain men the English shot?' (VP, 632) Clearly, duality, tension, uncertainty, and vacillation, which are characteristics of Yeats's writings, make it difficult if not impossible to identify him through the use of simple overt binaries and ready-made political labels such as reactionary/progressive, nationalist/unionist, colonialist/ anti-colonialist.

In an introductory essay to a special issue of *Critical Enquiry* entitled *Front Lines/Border Posts*, Homi Bhabha draws attention to an essay by Akeel Bilgrami. In 'What is a Muslim', Bilgrami suggests 'the possibility of being the moderate Muslim-an emergent minority position between the fundamentalist and the purely secular-that rests on the possibility of a certain ambivalent and contingent double consciousness'. Commenting on this passage, Bhabha writes that the identity of the moderate Muslim:

depends upon establishing an interstitial space of identification. The moderate Muslim is articulated in a movement in between third and first persons. It is, moreover, in this movement that a narrative of historical becoming is constituted not as a dialectic between first and third person but as an effect of the ambivalent condition of their borderline proximity-the first-in-the-third / the one in-the-other. The agon inherent in moderation succeeds as a political and cultural practice, as an act of toleration or moderation, *only on the condition that the first and third positions are accepted as living in an unresolved, ongoing, ambivalent articulation in relation to each other.*<sup>25</sup>

Applying this outlook to Yeats's case bears an interesting result. Perhaps a way out of the dilemma which the late Yeats's dual political attitudes have produced is to accept both opposite views of the old poet. In other words, instead of opting for either of the two alternative versions of him, that is, reactionary, authoritarian, colonialist versus progressive, liberal, postcolonialist, it is more fruitful to recognize the unresolved coexistence of the two, in Bhabha's terms 'in an unresolved, ongoing, ambivalent articulation to each other'.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in 'William Butler Yeats,' *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 23, (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., 1964), 881.

<sup>2</sup> Oliver Goldsmith (1728-74), Irish poet and dramatist, Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) the famous poet, author, satirist, and Dean of St Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin, George Berkeley (1685-1753), Irish idealist philosopher, Edmund Burke (1729-97), influential Anglo-Irish politician, orator and political thinker, and Charles Stewart Parnell (1846-1891) member of Parliament and later a political leader and an opponent of Home Rule for Ireland.

<sup>3</sup> For a representative collection of different views of Yeats's politics see Jonathan Allison, ed. *Yeats's Political Identities: Selected Essays* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996). See also Peter Liebrechts and Peter van de Kamp (eds.) *Tumult of Images: Essays on W.B. Yeats and Politics* (Amsterdam-Atlanta: Radopi, 1995), Paul Scott Stanfield, *Yeats and Politics in the 1930s* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988). For a summary of critical debate on the subject of Yeats's involvement with fascism, see Grattan Freyer, *Yeats and the Anti-Democratic Tradition* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1981). Freyer divides such critics such Connor Cruise O'Brien, George Orwell, and John Harrison, who have argued for Yeats's fascist inclinations, from such critics as Elizabeth Cullingford, Donald Torchiana, and Fahmy Farag who have argued against it.

<sup>4</sup> Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Passion and Cunning: An Essay on the Politics of W. B. Yeats', in eds., A. N. Jeffares and K. G. W. Cross, *In Excited Reverie: A Centenary Tribute to William Butler Yeats 1865-1939* (London, Macmillan, 1965), 207-78.

<sup>5</sup> From Seamus Deane's lecture in 'A Yeats Symposium', in ed., David Pierce, *W.B. Yeats Critical Assessments*, vol. 4 (Mountfield, East Sussex: Helm Information, 2000), 365-74, 367.

<sup>6</sup> David Lloyd, *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-colonial Moment* (Dublin: Lilliput, 1993), 59.

<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Cullingford, *Yeats, Ireland and Fascism* (London: Macmillan, 1981), 215.

<sup>8</sup> Bernard Benstock, 'The Soul of Yeats under Fascism', in *W.B. Yeats Critical Assessments*, vol. 4, 91-4, 94.

<sup>9</sup> Donald T. Torchiana, *W.B. Yeats & Georgian Ireland* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1992), 144, 145.

<sup>10</sup> For the formation of the Irish Free State see Joseph M. Curran, *The Birth of the Irish Free State, 1921-1923* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1980). See also Thomas E. Hachey, *Britain and Irish Separatism: From the Fenians to the Free State, 1867-1922*, (Chicago: Rand McNally College Pub. Co, 1977). For

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Yeats and Irish Free State see Bernard G. Krimm, *W.B. Yeats and the Emergence of the Irish Free State. 1918-1939: Living in Explosion* (New York, Whitston, 1981).

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in *W.B. Yeats & Georgian Ireland*, 112.

<sup>12</sup> R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972*, (London: The Penguin Press, 1988), 537. Gregory Castle, *Modernism and the Celtic Revival* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001), 91. See also Terence Brown, 'Part II: 1932-58' *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922-2002* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004), 129-226.

<sup>13</sup> The same image is used in part two of 'Three Marching Songs', where the same question is asked "What if there's nothing up there at the top?" , *VP*, 615.

<sup>14</sup> Jahan Ramazani, 'Is Yeats a Postcolonial Poet?' in *W.B. Yeats Critical Assessments*, vol. 4, 794-813, 800.

<sup>15</sup> Frantz Fanon, 'The Pitfalls of National Consciousness', in *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin Books, 1967), 119-165.

<sup>16</sup> Daniel Albright, ed., *W. B. Yeats, The Poems* (London: Everyman, 1994), 704.

<sup>17</sup> For different views on Yeats and eugenics see the followings: David Bradshaw, 'The Eugenics Movement in the 1930s and the Emergence of *On the Boiler*', in ed., Deirdre Toomey, *Yeats and Women, Yeats Annual*, 9 (1992), 189-215. Paul Scott Stanfield, 'Yeats and Eugenics', in *Yeats and Politics in the 1930s* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), 145-83, Spurgeon Thompson, 'Yeats and Eugenicism: The Garrison Mentality in a Decolonizing Ireland', in ed., Deborah Fleming, *W.B. Yeats and Postcolonialism* (West Cornwall, CT: Locust Hill Press, 2001), 27-49. See also Marjorie Elizabeth Howes, 'The rule of kindred: eugenics, *Purgatory*, and Yeats's race philosophy', in *Yeats's Nations: Gender, Class, and Irishness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 160-85.

<sup>18</sup> Howes, *Yeats's Nations: Gender, Class, and Irishness*, 169.

<sup>19</sup> Stanfield, *Yeats and Politics in the 1930s*, 147.

<sup>20</sup> See for example Lewis Perry Curtis, Jr., *Anglo-Saxons and Celts: A Study of Anti-Irish Prejudice in Victorian England* (Bridge-Port, Connecticut: University of Bridgeport, 1968) and his *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature*, (Newton Abbott, Devon: David Charles Ltd. 1971), Richard Ned Lebow, *White Britain and Black Ireland: The Influence of Stereotype on Colonial Policy*, (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1976), and Maureen Waters, *The Comic Irishman* (Albany: University of New York Press, 1984).

<sup>21</sup> Curtis, Jr., *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature*, vii.

<sup>22</sup> Spurgeon Thompson, 'Yeats and Eugenicism: The Garrison Mentality in a Decolonizing Ireland', in *W.B. Yeats and Postcolonialism*, 27-49, 30.

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<sup>23</sup> Margaret Mills Harper, 'Twilight to Vision: Yeats's Collaborative Modernity', in *Bucknell Review*, 38:1 (1994), 61-83, 64.

<sup>24</sup> Edward Larrissy, *Yeats the Poet: The Measures of Difference* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), 179.

<sup>25</sup> Homi Bhabha, 'Editor's Introduction: Minority Maneuvers and Unsettled Negotiations', in *Critical Enquiry*, 23:3, *Front Lines/Border Posts* (Spring, 1997), 431-59. Italics are mine.

## CONCLUSION

The question of Yeats's identity has always been an important issue in the criticism of the Irish poet, beginning perhaps with Richard Ellmann's perceptive book, which bears the same title, *The Identity of Yeats*. With the advent of postcolonial theory into Irish studies in general and Yeats studies in particular, this controversial issue has gained new dimensions. Whether Yeats was a revolutionary and anti-colonial nationalist or a poet with unionist and colonialist inclinations has been the subject of much debate and less agreement. One can justify any of these versions of Yeats by concentrating on some of his works and utterances and ignoring some others. However, this will result in an incomplete and partial picture of a complex, multi-dimensional, and ever-changing poet such as Yeats. Unfortunately, a considerable portion of Yeats criticism, which deals with the status of Yeats as a poet writing in a once-colonized country, has adopted an either/or approach. More recent critical projects, however, have called for more comprehensive and impartial approaches to the question of Yeats's identity. What Brian Graham mentions at the end of his preface to *In Search of Ireland: A cultural Geography* is quite apposite to Yeats. Graham refers to the book's contributors' variety of views and perspectives, and then notes that among all the contributors, however, there is 'an overall consensus on the need to deconstruct monoliths of exclusive identity in Ireland in favour of narratives of diversity, inclusiveness, hybridity and fluidity-cultural contexts which have to be matched by political flexibility'.<sup>1</sup>

Trying to avoid a monolithic, static, and unchanging reading of Yeats's colonial identity, the focus of this thesis has been on the issue of hybridity, a key concept in postcolonial theory and discourse. As the editors of *The Post-Colonial Reader* have noted, 'hybridity and the power it releases may well be seen as the characteristic feature and contribution of the post-colonial'.<sup>2</sup> In the previous chapters I have mostly drawn on Homi Bhabha's notions of hybridity of the colonial discourse and colonial identities. His approach to this issue questions essentialist models of identity, which rely on the simple either/or binary of colonizer/colonized. Bhabha, on the other hand,

stresses the similarities and the borrowings, the simultaneous love and fear, attachment and detachment, which characterize the complex and multi-layered relationship between the two sides of the colonial divide. He argues that 'historical becoming is constituted not as a dialectic between first and third person but as an effect of the *ambivalent* condition of the borderline proximity - the first-in-the-third / the one-in-the-other'.<sup>3</sup> I believe that the hybrid and in-between subject position, which consists of an interweaving between the identities of both the colonizer and the colonized, can best accommodate the development, duality, and presence of opposite views which were recurrent characteristics in Yeats's life and his works. This, of course, does not mean that Bhabha provides us with final and irrefutable answers to the complex question of Yeats's political and colonial identity. However, his views on the hybrid nature of colonial subjects can enhance our understanding of Yeats's verse, prose and drama. They can enrich our experience of reading Yeats by helping us to uncover new possibilities for exploring his works. Throughout this thesis, departing from Bhabha's views on the colonial identities of both the colonized and the colonizer, I have endeavoured to present a chronological reading of Yeats which foregrounds complexities, changes, tensions, and even contradictions inherent in Yeats's relationship with both Irish anti-colonial nationalism and British colonialism.

In the introduction to my dissertation, after giving a brief overview of different strands in Yeats criticism, I have moved to the central point of this thesis, that is, William Butler Yeats's status as a (anti/post)colonial figure. I have mentioned that my point of departure for a postcolonial reading of Yeats has been Homi Bhabha's views, especially the concepts of hybridity and ambiguity which he proposes as important factors in the complex relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. Briefly speaking, he moves beyond a black and white approach that regards colonial identities as distinct, clear-cut, and fixed. Instead the focus of his argument is on the borrowings, the similarities and the circularities inherent in colonial relationships. My main argument is that the dualities, the uncertainties, and different stances which Yeats took in his relationship with Irish nationalism and British colonialism fit well within the concept of hybridity of the colonial subject.

In chapter one I have given a selective and representative review of different definitions of postcolonialism, arguments against and for the postcoloniality of Ireland, and finally various critical readings of Yeats as a (anti/post)colonial poet. I have shown that much of this criticism approaches the Irish poet in an either/or way; either he is depicted as a poet with reactionary and colonialist inclinations or he is portrayed as a revolutionary and anti-colonial poet. Either view ignores the change, circularity, and complexity, which were part and parcel of Yeats's thought and works. I have then stated that my own thesis follows the more recent critical approaches, which have moved beyond a Manichean view of Yeats's politics in general and his colonial status in particular, and have tried to trace the changes, the ambiguities, and the dualities of Yeats's attitudes in a colonial context.

The focus of chapter two is the early years of Yeats's career. It covers the last two decades of the nineteenth century when the young poet was actively involved in cultural, and for a period, political nationalism. By considering Yeats's poetry and prose of this early period, I have endeavoured to show that Yeats's relationship to and interaction with the mainstream Irish nationalism of his time was never easy and comfortable. Even at the height of his political activities, there was an element of doubt, uncertainty and detachment from what he was involved in. These feelings of being out of touch, irrelevant, and not belonging to the nationalist movement appear in some of his early poetry, when he tries to prove the opposite. As to his cultural agenda of these early years, that is, to revive the Irish cultural heritage, what came to be known as the Celtic Revival, the young poet was somehow departing from and relying on the same colonial stereotypes of the Irish which he had set out to overturn. I have argued that it is exactly the presence of these hesitations, and circularities in the young Yeats's engagement with the anti-colonial Irish struggle which make him a suitable example of Homi Bhabha's concept of the 'hybrid identities', the subject who cannot be contained in the simple binary of colonizer/colonized.



Chapter three moves to the middle years of Yeats's career and discusses the first two decades of the twentieth century. In this chapter, by looking at two of his most famous works (*Cathleen ni Houlihan* and 'Easter, 1916'), I have argued for the inherent duality in Yeats's attitudes towards the questions of martyrdom and self-sacrifice within the context of Irish nationalism. Established critical opinion considers *Cathleen ni Houlihan* as Yeats's most inflammatory and nationalistic play. This is due to the content and the theme of the play which had a great impact on the nationalist opinion of its time. But this is only one side of the coin, the other side mirrors Yeats's doubts about and aloofness from the revolutionary message of his play. I have tried to show Yeats's own reservations about and detachment from the message of *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, both in the remarks and comments he made about it and in the play itself. Likewise, in his elegy memorializing the martyrs of the Easter rebellion in 1916, Yeats adopted a dual attitude regarding the sacrifice of the Irish nationalists. The poem is a mixture of praise for and at the same time a questioning of the Easter rebellion and its bloody outcome. I have concluded that Yeats's divided and double attitudes in these two works reflect the hybrid nature of his colonial identity.

Yeats's complex reaction to the two consecutive wars in Irish history during the 1920s, the Anglo-Irish war and the Irish civil war, has been the focus of chapter four. As a result of these two wars the process of decolonization sped up in Ireland and the country entered an at least partially postcolonial state by achieving home rule. What I have argued for is that in both poems Yeats wrote about these wars, 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen' and 'Meditations in Time of Civil War', he was unable to wholly take side with either side of these conflicts. Nor is the latter poem a simple eulogy to the Anglo-Irish tradition as some critics have claimed. Whether in the war of the colonized against the colonizer (the Anglo-Irish war), or in the battle between the colonized themselves (Republicans versus Free State supporters), Yeats's stance is far from offering complete support for either party. Rather, these two poems implicate both the Irish nationalists and the British colonialists in the bloodshed and destruction of war. On the other hand if the speaker of 'Meditations in Time of Civil War' feels sympathy for the fighting troops and is at times urged to join them, it is not certain to

which side he would lend his allegiances. This lack of certainty and the poet's unresolved loyalties, finally, is another sign of his conflicted colonial position.

Chapter five looks at the last years of Yeats's life. After giving a short account of the various diverse preoccupations of the old poet, I have turned to the question of the late Yeats's politics. In general we get a double picture of the old poet's political views. His praise for violence and war, his support for an authoritarian form of government, and his contempt for what he considers degenerate races could rightly depict him as a reactionary and colonialist poet. Yet his defence of the freedom for minorities, individuals' rights, and his harsh criticism of the newly-formed Irish government could portray him as a true postcolonial artist. This duality and contradiction in his opinions challenges any facile critical view, one which tries to categorize the old poet and his political commitments with any praising or reproving label.

Throughout his long career, William Butler Yeats was always, in one way or another, attracted to and involved in the question of Irish politics. Whether during the time Ireland was a colony, or after her entry into the status of a partially postcolonial state, this involvement had never been static, straightforward, and comfortable. His writings represent an often conflicted response to the issues of Irish nationalism and British colonialism. What I have tried to stress throughout this thesis is that Yeats's body of work, his political beliefs, and his involvement in the anti-colonial struggle of the Irish call for an approach which takes into account issues such as change, hybridity, and instability. My main argument has been that it is more productive and fruitful to attend to the internal tensions and contradictions inherent in Yeats's poetry than to put any laudatory or condemnatory brand on them. In other words, I have tried to suggest that Yeats's often contradictory, varied, and uncertain attitudes and stances, which were mirrored time and again in his different works, cannot simply be defined once and for all by using ready-made political labels. Finally I hope this thesis has shown how a basic issue of postcolonial debates, the hybrid identity of the colonial subject, can enrich our understanding of a complex poet such as Yeats.

With the publication of *W.B. Yeats and Postcolonialism* in 2001, postcolonial readings of Yeats have established themselves as critical approaches, which can increase our awareness of the Irish poet's complex role in and his conflicted interaction with a colonized and then a (partially) postcolonial Ireland. Different critics have started to approach Yeats from a postcolonial point of view. There still remains much to be said of Yeats in a (post)colonial framework. Many issues and debates, which invigorate current postcolonial studies, can add to our experience of reading Yeats. Among these, an interesting potential field could be his complex interaction with the English language: that is, how he came to adopt English and not Irish as the language of his poems, and how he changed and modified the language of the colonizer for his own purposes. More can be written about the final years of Yeats's life, which for a lack of space, I have not been able to look at in greater depth than I have done in the previous chapters.

George Bornstein has called Yeats 'perhaps the most complex mind of our century', and he has stressed that 'one cannot fully come to grips with him through any single approach'.<sup>4</sup> The more one studies Yeats, the more one tends to agree with Bornstein's view. No single critical view can lay claim to a full exploration of the multiple facets of Yeats's personality and his poetry. Yet each single critical approach can shed light on some side of this multidimensional body of work, thus helping us to a fuller understanding of the poet's complex mind. Certainly a postcolonial theory, which foregrounds questions of diversity, change and hybridity, can be a suitable approach, yielding a great deal of insight into a poet whose life and work involved conflict and who believed that 'all things are from antithesis' (*AV*, 268).

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Brian Graham, ed., *In Search of Ireland: A Cultural Geography* (London: Routledge, 1997), xii.

<sup>2</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995), 183.

<sup>3</sup> Homi Bhabha, 'Editor's Introduction: Minority Maneuvers and Unsettled Negotiations', in *Critical Inquiry*, 23:3, Front Lines/Border Posts (Spring, 1997), 431-459, 434.

<sup>4</sup> George Bornstein, *Yeats and Shelley* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1970), xv.

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