

Rached Khalifa

Title: *The Rhetoric of Transition or Political Allegoria in the Young Yeats.*

Consciousness is conflict.
WB Yeats Autobiographies.

Nowhere is Yeats's awareness of consciousness as conflict better articulated than in his early text or in what might be called his pastoral phase. In this juvenile text the poet's consciousness of the urgency and importance of the political manifests itself in the form of allegorical distortion or distantiation. My main concern in this article is to show the different mechanisms and poetic strategies deployed by the Yeatsian text at this stage to blur and defamiliarise the relation between the poet's growing political consciousness and his tenacious clinging to an ideal – ie *apolitical* – form of poetics or aesthetics. The tension or conflict arising from this consciousness, quite interestingly, articulates itself in the rhetoric of discursive duplicity of diglossia, following which Yeats's text at this stage finds itself torn between two forces: an increasingly intrusive political and historical reality and a residual tenacious textual resistance to this reality which has been gathered from Spenserian pastoralism. The conflict is resolved in the space of the trope, and the tension is eased out through stylistic *manoeuvres*. In addition to the early poetry, my focus shall linger quite lengthily on the poem "Two Titans, a Political Poem" which, though hitherto considered a minor text in Yeats's canon, I do believe that it is highly seminal to our understanding of the poet's growth not in terms of poetic style and thematic, but more importantly, in terms of Yeats's political and ideological development. Hence the significance of this early experimental poetry.

If *The Wanderings of Oisín*, for instance, does not so much distance itself stylistically from *The Island of Statues*, it does so considerably at the thematic level.¹ Although both texts are deeply steeped in the Pre-Raphaelite tradition, the subject matter of *The Wanderings* represents in itself somewhat of a radical thematic shift in Yeats's poetic career. Despite the fact that *The Island of Statues* embodies a latent dissatisfaction with the theme of pastoral, it nonetheless remains Yeats's pastoral *locus classicus*. The poem shows the young poet's encapsulation within the rhetoric or emulation of Spenserian and Shelleyan modes. *The Island of Statues* "takes its Circe-like enchantress from Spenser, and most of its verse-texture from Shelley", Harold Bloom rightly suggests.²

Unlike *The Island*, *The Wanderings of Oisín* ushers Yeats into a new cycle of poetic thematisation. Yet, strangely enough, no radical stylistic rupture seems to have accompanied this thematic metamorphosis. The Yeatsian text remains as "too elaborate" and "too ornamental" as the previous poetry, as the poet himself acknowledges in retrospect.³ Yeats's devaluation of his early poetic ornamentalism of course comes after his adoption of the poetics of nudity ("going naked"), or aesthetic exhibitionism, so to speak, in the poem "A Coat".⁴ Yet *The Wanderings of Oisín*, one must observe, represents in itself a pivotal text not so much on the textural structure as on the thematic place. It articulates a desire to shift from the poetics of Arcadian pastoralism to that Yeats calls "imaginative nationalism", that is to say, from the rhetoric of universalism to the politics of particularism. In his letters of 1890 Yeats asserts this call for aesthetic localism: "All poetry should have a local habitation";

“We should make poems on the familiar landscapes we love, not the strange and glittering ones one wonders at”.⁵ In another respect, he admits that until twenty he “preferred to all other countries Arcadia and the India of Romance, but presently I convinced myself [...] that I should never go for the scenery of a poem to any country but my own”.⁶ In western Ireland, and more precisely in the landscapes of Sligo and Galway, Yeats now finds ideal *loci* for his poetic muse. Romanticising or, better still, glamourising these locales will never abandon the Yeatsian project.⁷

The Wanderings of Oisín is a political poem not so much because it allegorises politics but rather because it demonstrates quite literally for the first time in Yeats’s poetic career his commitment to celebrate and poeticise national mythology, culture and geography. In addition to its allegorical or symbolist readings, the poem should equally be read *literally* – as a literal celebration of Irish mythology. The poem is after all Irish in name, as Ellmann notes.⁸ “From the moment I began *The Wanderings of Oisín* [...] my subject matter became Irish, Yeats admits retrospectively. His aesthetisation of Irish mythology, spiritism and landscape no doubt represents a radical shift from his early celebration of the virtual and artificial reality of Arcadia. The aesthetic act becomes rooted in a concrete experience of the nation. Yeats’s project to nationalise poetic production and his determination “to dwell in the house of Fenians” are unambiguously expressed in the last two lines of *The Wanderings of Oisín*. In a self-reflexive fashion, the lines literally put an end of Yeats’s own Arcadian thematic wanderings:

I will go to Caoilte, and Conan, and Bran, Sceolan, Lomair,
And dwell in the house of the Fenians, be they in flames or at feast.

The poetic act is as such politicised. It becomes intimately intertwined with proximate reality. It is re-territorialised within the context of Irish geo-politics. It becomes an act of cultural resistance, a de-colonising project, as Edward Said argues.⁹ In “Ireland and the Arts” Yeats exhorts the Irish artists to awake to the illusion that art is “tribeless”, “nationless” and a “blossom gathered in No Man’s Land”. He urges the young Irish artists to look within the national borders for creativity, authenticity and originality. Art must first and foremost grow from “contact” with the national “soil”:

John Synge, I and Augusta Gregory, thought
All we did, all that we said or sang
Must come from contact with the soil, from that
Contact everything Antaeus-like grew strong.

This politics of aesthetic nationalisation, Yeats assumes, revives and sets ablaze the nation’s Great Memory. It sets in motion the process of emancipation from the colonial aesthetic, cultural and political yoke. Such a politics resists cultural subordination and defacement, and hence guarantees national self-determination. He asserts that “he who studies the legends, and history, and life of his own countryside may find there all the themes of art and song [and] there is no nationality without literature, no literature without nationality”.¹⁰ Only through aesthetic emancipation can political liberation be achieved. Emancipation is primarily aesthetic, and the aesthetic must be celebratory of cultural and geographical proximity:

I would rather speak to those who are beginning to write, as I was some sixteen years ago, without any decided impulse to one thing more than another, and especially to those who are convinced, that art is tribeless, nationless, a blossom gathered in No Man's Land. The Greeks looked within their borders, and we, like them, have a history fuller than any modern history of imaginative events; and legends which surpass, as I think, all legends but theirs in wild beauty, and in our land, as in theirs, there is no river or mountain that is not associated in the memory with some event or legend; while political reasons have made love of country, as I think, even greater among us than among them. I would have our writers and craftsmen of many kinds master this history and these legends, and fix upon their memory the appearance of mountains and rivers and make it all visible again in their arts, so that Irishmen, even though they had gone thousands of miles away, would still be in their own country.¹¹

Yet one must point out that despite Yeats's call for politicising the poetic subject matter, his text had by no means amounted to what might be called *texte engagé*, say, in the tradition of the Young Irelanders of 1840s such as Thomas Osborne Davis (1841-45), James Clarence Mangan (1803-49), and Sir Samuel Ferguson (1810-86). Yeats always undervalued this tradition on the grounds that it culls its rhetoric from facile nationalism – from what he calls “conscious patriotism”. In the somewhat apologetic poem “To Ireland in the Coming Times” Yeats distances his poetry from the Young Ireland tradition arguing that his art, because it delves into the “unseen” – the occult, makes the idea of nationalism more profound and more enduring in the collective mind of the nation.

Know, that I would account be
True brother of a company
That sang, to sweeten Ireland's wrong,
Ballad and story, rann and song ...
Nor I may less be counted one with Davis, Mangan, Ferguson,
Because, to him who ponders well,
My rhymes more than their rhyming tell
Of things discovered in the deep,
Where only body's laid sleep.

Yeats's call for ridding Irish poetry of Davisian influence is reiterated when he juxtaposes William Allingham's romantic nationalism with Davis's “conscious patriotism”:

Allingham and Davis are two different kinds of love of Ireland. In Allingham I find the entire emotion for the place one grew up in which I felt as a child. Davis on the other hand was concerned with ideas of Ireland, with conscious patriotism. His Ireland was artificial, an idea built up in a couple of generations by a few commonplace men. This

artificial idea has done me as much harm as the other helped me.¹²

Yeats claims that his foundation of The Irish Literary Society and The National Literary Society was mainly “to denounce the propagandistic verse and prose” bequeathed by the Young Ireland tradition.¹³ The artist, he insists, must make his work “a part of his journey to beauty and truth”.¹⁴ The statement is a synthesis of all of Keatsian, Rossettian and Paterian philosophies of aestheticism. The quest for “truth”, Yeats goes on, must not be sought to the detriment of the “beauty” of the work of art. Aesthetics is as essential as politics. Yet where, say, Keats values “truth” and “beauty *per se*, that is to say, as purely aesthetic and apolitical autonomous entities,¹⁵ Yeats’s notions are, to be sure, closely related to his idea of the nation, nationalism and culture. They are inextricable from proximate politics – at least at this phase. His valorisation of aesthetics becomes strategic. It is inextricable from his tactics for national self-determination.

The sites of convergence and divergence between Yeats and Keats with regard to the notions of “beauty/truth” are determined by the fact that the poets inhabit two politically antithetic places, and yet, poetically speaking, these are intersectional, overlapping territories. Yeats’s indebtedness to the English Romantic tradition is such that it makes him incapable of sloughing it off radically for a purely national poetics. The English Shakespeares, Blakes, Shelleys and Keatses are too powerfully present in the Yeatsian poetic imagination to eradicate completely. The issue becomes even more problematic – if not schizophrenic – for someone who bases cultural renaissance on the language of the “coloniser”. Yeats is well aware of this paradox from the start. Yet nowhere is Yeats’s consciousness of his positional crisis more genuinely and movingly spelt out than in his last years:

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.¹⁶

This positional crisis and ambiguity is probably anticipated as early as in “The Two Titans, A Political Poem”. The poem pictures a “grey-haired youth” forever chained to a ferocious “sibyl”. Allegorical as it is, the poem conflates the subjective with the national and the poetic with the political. Harold Bloom, for instance, rejects Ellmann’s political reading of the poem on the grounds that it is “reductive”. He maintains that the allegory is purely aesthetic – personal – relating Yeats’s own bondage to the Romantic Muse.¹⁷ “On the Shelleyan and Blakean analogies,” Bloom goes on, “[The Two Titans] has a clear and impressive meaning – the poet, if he relies on a naturalistic Muse, participates in the bondage of nature, and is devoured by his own Muse”. Subtle and pertinent as it sounds, Bloom’s reading of the allegory seems to me as reductive as Ellmann’s. It is so not only because it ignores the subtitle “A Political Poem” as “misleading” – something Ellmann takes seriously in his analysis of the poem – but simply because it does not relate the personal experience with the political situation, poetic struggle with political anxiety or, simply, text with context. The allegory rather exposes Yeats’s encapsulation between an English heritage (language and poetic tradition) he cannot shake off and his project of cultural

nationalism that might easily be discredited by an Irish political context more and more hostile to any form of Englishness. Dr Hyde's subsequent call for "de-Anglicising Ireland" and the foundation of the Gaelic League in 1893 would but exacerbate Yeats's predicament, if not identity crisis, as explicitly expressed in the above quoted passage. Yeats finally resolves the crisis by admitting that "Gaelic is [his] national language, but it is not [his] mother tongue".¹⁸

In the same way as "The Two Titans" can be read as a political poem because it allegorises Yeats's negotiations of his own English heritage with his love for Ireland, it can also be interpreted as a political allegory of the Anglo-Irish colonial yoke, as Ellmann observes.¹⁹ The oxymoronic union between coloniser and colonised is respectively allegorised in the form of a bondage between a helpless "youth" and a rapacious sibyl:

Two figures crouching on the black rock, bound
To one another with a coiling chain;
A grey-haired youth, whose cheeks had never found,
Or long ere this had lost their ruddy stain;
A sibyl, with fierce face of a hound ...

Yeats's political consciousness, as I have explained before, did not take shape without resistance to textual politicisation. This resistance, as a matter of fact, engendered somewhat schizophrenic texts during the transitional period. To understand this we must not attempt, as Deleuze and Guattari warn us, "to describe the schizophrenic object without relating it to the process of production".²⁰ In Yeats, this process of production, however, is determined by the historical moment during which his text is written – that is to say, by the historical place wherein the text positions itself in relation to the poet's career. In this case it is the space of transition. "The Two Titans, A Political Poem" embodies *par excellence* the tension from such a structure of feeling – ie transition. The poem is caught halfway between what might be called *littérature imagée* and *littérature engagée*. The problem at stake is primarily of self-orientation, that is, whether to continue celebrating poetic disinterestedness or to commit oneself to political praxis. This sense of thematic disorientation, and placelessness, tellingly voiced in Yeats's recurrent and over-determined diasporic "wanderings", accounts for much of the poem's schizophrenic structure. Yet, paradoxically enough, it is owing to this thematic precariousness and crisis that the poem imposes itself as a "strong" text in the Yeatsian canon, at least for Ellmann and Bloom.

This textual schizophrenia is best felt in the title "The Two Titans", whose *addendum* "A Political Poem" demands, as Ellmann insists, "recognition" but, strangely enough, we observe that it is "deliberately obscured" throughout the poem. Ellmann remarks perspicaciously that "for a political poem "The Two Titans" is strangely apolitical".²¹ Yet one can argue that it is precisely because of its apoliticalness the poem becomes political. In its attempt to obscure politics the poem defines itself as a political act. The title captures perfectly well this duplicity of discourse. It forces two incompatible paradigms of referentiality, the allegorical and the deictic, into co-existence. This forced cohabitation between allusion and straightforwardness obviously ends up with a textual divorce, with a structural disruption between the poem's tendency to obscure, allegorise, and what sounds like political realism announced from the

exordium. This forced union fissures the text into two colliding discourses, into two incompatible modes of signification – allegory and realism – whereby the fragile one is crushed under the weight of the better established one – here it is *allegoria*. The poem’s textural disruption is exacerbated by the schizoid “comma” in the title. It will take Yeats several years before he banishes *allegoria* from his text,²² and starts to incorporate proximate politics and history more boldly and deictically into poems such as “September 1913”, “The Easter Rising 1916” and “Meditations in Time of Civil War”.

The different, if not contradictory, readings, of “The Two Titans” do not result solely from different stances in critical hermeneutics, but also originate from the orientational ambiguity inherent in the poem itself. The rhetoric of duplicity of the poem, already articulated in the title, originates precisely at the very position the poem occupies in Yeats’s *oeuvre*. “The Two Titans” is wedged, as it were, between two radically different thematic configurations, *The Island of Statues* and *The Wanderings of Oisín*. The poem, in other words, is caught up between Yeats’s pastoral allegorisation and his subsequent political textualisation. Written in the history of transition, in the diglossia of metamorphosis, so to speak, the poem cannot but encode and re-inscribe within its discursive and thematic structures the ambivalence of transition, the double discourse of metamorphosis. The poem thus forms a space of reconciliation where a worn-out yet still tenacious theme and a new triumphant one are brought together into cohabitation. As such, the poem constitutes a Janus-like body on which the inscriptions of the past still impinge upon the present, and wherein the grip of the naturalistic Enchantress still paralyses the rebellious “grey-haired youth”. “The Two Titans” is a text in which Yeats the pastoralist (allegorist) and Yeats the nationalist (symbolist) collide and come to a short-lived collusion, for the divorce is imminent in *The Wanderings of Oisín* – at least at the thematic level.

Yeats’s divorce from the pastoral Enchantress and his subsequent espousal of the Irish *Sidhe* might crudely be reduced to two major factors: influence and history. The first comes from the poet’s encounter with the old Fenian John O’Leary in 1885, the second from the specificity of Irish actuality in the post-Famine period. If Spenser and Shelly had taught Yeats his pastoral theme, O’Leary then not only initiated him to the Young Ireland tradition, but also shaped his idea of the nation and politics.²³ He learned from him his “romantic conception of Irish Nationality”, which must be founded on nothing other than “literature, our art and our Irish criticism”.²⁴ Yeats’s possessive pronoun is particularly significant here. Inasmuch as it shows the extent to which charismatic O’Leary had influenced his theme and politics, it also demonstrated Yeats’s conscious reversal of his former pastoral egocentric “my/I” into the highly communal, if quasisocialistic, collective “our”. The transition is from subjectivity to communality, from ego-centrism to natio-centrism, so to speak. The early rhetoric of narcissism is now supplanted by a solidifying sense of “imagined community”,²⁵ as community bound up by cultural and historical unity. The rhetoric of the “seashell” in the earlier poetry is now abandoned, and the mirror of Narcissus is demonised in “The Two Trees”:

Gaze no more in the bitter glass ...
For there a fatal image grows ...
In the dim glass the demons hold.

Yeats's sense of community and his involvement with Irish politics is also influenced by other encounters, namely William Morris, Maud Goone, the Irish Joan of Arc, and last but not least Lady Gregory. If Maud Goone turned out to be Yeats's "Belle Dame sans Merci" or *femme fatale*, Lady Gregory was a "centre of peace" for him and his poetry, a rare residue from a moribund aristocratic tradition. Where O'Leary shaped Yeats's theoretical conception of Irish nationalism, Maud Goone dragged him into the maelstrom of political agitation.

Yet to return Yeats's political consciousness exclusively to these encounters would certainly be an unacceptable over-simplification. My idea is that though these encounters have shaped to a good measure Yeats's conception of theme, style and politics, they as yet did nothing but hasten and catalyse an already latent process of textual politicisation. This process could be traced as really as *The Island of Statues*. The process was at work in the Yeatsian text right from the outset of his poetic career. The incursions of proximate politics, though sporadic and sparse at this stage, are significant in the sense that they are early inscriptions and articulations of an overall political ideology against modernity, which gather in more momentum and assertiveness in the course of Yeats's career.

What should be underscored is that each poetic period in Yeats seems to articulate the same ideological philosophy despite its historical, stylistic and thematic particularities. While it is true that Yeats's trope has gone through different revisions and re-formulations, his ideological quest, quite paradoxically, remains relentlessly constant and systematic. From the outset the quest is governed by the same teleology: "to hammer [his] thoughts into 'unity'". "Unity" is a paradigmatic concept in Yeats's philosophy, be it sought in pastoral, politics, aesthetics or history. It is fundamental. The trajectory of the quest, as is clear, is in essence essential and organicist from the start. It is a relentless search for what Yeats called "elemental powers". Power in Yeats is mystical. It is a subliminal experience. It is visionary and apocalyptic. Yet one must point out here that displaced onto the political sphere such a view of power might *in potentia* represent a risky challenge to rationality. Political power, if mystified – inasmuch as mysticism is politicised – may slip too easily into the rhetoric of Fascism.²⁶ The history of fascism is replete with visionary mystics.²⁷ Mass nationalism and religion cull their discourse from the rhetoric of nebulosity and symbolic suggestion. They are primarily psychological constructs – hence their power for mass mobilisation.²⁸ Yeats is well aware of this power: "There is no feeling, except religious feeling, which moves the masses of men to powerfully as national feeling, and upon this we build our principal hopes". Through this statement does not anticipate Yeats's later disillusionment with Irish nationalism by the turn of the century, it still reflects his consciousness of the symmetry between religion and nationalism. Yeats claims that his quest for unity is primarily mystical and spiritual; but it is evident that much of his occultism is intermeshed with political ideology. His notion of "Unity of Being", for instance, is inextricable from the rather more ideologised "Unity of Culture", or from the aesthetic version of "Unity of Image". The three unities are barely extricable from one another. Being, culture and aesthetics are homologised in Yeats.

In addition to these crucial encounters the historical moment also proved a determinant force that had radically affected Yeats's text and politics. At the heyday

of its struggle for decolonisation, Ireland was transformed by the end of the century into a nation where even benign daily deeds became political acts. In post-Famine Ireland, and more precisely, in the political tumult of the 1880s and 1890s no room was left for gratuitous or neutral acts and stances. One had to choose one's camp, Unionist, nationalist, Parnellite, anti-Parnellite, Gaelic League activist, Land League supporter, Revivalist, Anglicist, De-anglicist, etc. Irish actuality was a context where text, act and politics became inextricable from one another; words and acts ineluctably coalesced with proximate politics.²⁹ Describing this context of national effervescence and amalgamation, wherein the aesthetic is inexorably politicised and the political becomes inextricable from the aesthetic, Yeats says:

We [...] tried to be unpolitical, and yet all that we did was dominated by the 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.³⁰

In this collective excitement for decolonisation, the Yeatsian text is left with little choice but to join the historical mainstream of the nation. Proximity becomes too present and overwhelming to occlude or even repress. Under the weight of this actuality Yeats's pastoral closure splits open to Irish subject matters, political praxis and communal aspirations. Yet this is by no means to insinuate that Yeats's text has been forced into nationalism nor to argue that in this general will for self-determination the poet has found something of a self-serving interest. I would not go so far as to accuse Yeats of political opportunism and "cunning", as Conor Cruise O'Brien intransigently does. Yet I do believe that Yeats's politics is forged by this dialectical interaction between history and text, the worldly and the poetic – in short, between politics and aesthetics. Yeats's commitment to Irish nationalism has been authenticated by Edward Said.³¹ Yet the issue is not as simple as Said puts it. Yeats's relation to Irish nationalism is problematic, complex, and still remains a source of controversy amongst critics. I think it should rather be studied with reference to a broader philosophical, ideological and historical context in which the Yeatsian text happens to find itself. This, however, should not by any means discredit Yeats's nationalist politics, crystallised in his vision of a "romantic" Ireland diametrically antithetic to England. This adds another complexity to his nationalism, which not only confuses his own but baffles the critics as well.

Though Yeats appeared to have found in occultism something of a new area of investigation that paralleled his political consciousness, this interest in Cabalistic theosophy should be interpreted as nothing other than a concurrent and an uncanny articulation of the same political consciousness. Yeats's Cabalistic investigation is inextricably intertwined with his conception of nationalism, not solely because it is intimately associated with his project of "spiritualising" Irish history and "soil", but mostly because it is closely related to his politics of cultural resistance. Although his direct involvement with Irish nationalism witnessed some fluctuations, Yeats, nevertheless, remains one of the most influential and emblematic figures of decolonisation in Ireland. This is so not by virtue of what he did directly in the political arena, but rather more significantly, by virtue of what he directly added to the Irish cultural heritage.³² Yeats's cultural resistance, crystallised in his narration of Ireland's mythical heroism and folk literature, his revival of the nation's cultural

memory, and his decolonisation of Irish poetry from metropolitan themes as well as from local sentimentalism (ie “conscious patriotism”), all these have greatly contributed to the forging of the imagination of Easter Rising in 1916.³³ There is no doubt that this revivalist project accelerated the untying of the colonial bondage. In “The Man and the Echo”, in a rhetorical question, Yeats interrogated the connection between his text and political praxis, more precisely, between his play *Cathleen in Houlihan* and the Easter Rising of 1916:

Did that play of mine send out
Certain men the English shot?

Yeats’s political consciousness manifests itself in complex and multi-faceted forms. It varies from his crude politics of “cultural archaeology” to his grotesque, if ludicrous, occult hankering after spirits in automatic script. Yet these versatile articulations of politics are different only on the surface. Under this manifest diversity lies Yeats’s imperturbable belief in what he theorises as “Unity of Culture”. This “Unity of Culture” is nothing other than a variation of his mystical “Unity of Being”. With his emphasis on national culture Yeats seems now to politicise the concept. His romantic celebration of the nation, his politics of cultural unit, his deconstruction of metropolitan Celticism in *The Celtic Element in Literature* – all these are enterprises that genuinely demonstrate Yeats’s growing consciousness of the necessity and urgency of political praxis. With the *Wandering of Oisín*, Yeats starts to ground his poetic text in the mainstream of Irish immediate political and historical reality.

¹ Richard Ellmann, *Yeats: The Man and the Masks* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973 [1949]), p. 52.

² Harold Bloom, *Yeats* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 53

³ Yeats, *Autobiographies* (London: Macmillan, 1980), p. 371

⁴ This poetic project is announced clearly in “The Coat”:

I made my song a coat
Covered with embroideries
Out of old mythologies
From heel to throat ...
Song, let them take it,
For there's more enterprise
In walking naked.

Yet, one must point out that the poet's call for poetic exhibitionism can be traced as early as “Words” (1908), wherein Yeats expresses his growing weariness of the “sun”. The “solar” is of course associated with aesthetic ornamentalism, and as such antithetical to the “lunar”, which Yeats took from Mathers' symbolical system: “solar, according to all that I learnt from Mathers, meant elaborate, full of artifice, rich, all that resembles the work of a goldsmith, whereas ‘water’ meant ‘lunar’, and ‘lunar’ all that is simple, popular, traditional, emotional” (*Autobiographies*, p. 371). The poetic version of this lies in these lines:

And I grew weary of the sun
until my thoughts cleared up again,
Remembering that the best I have done
Was done to make it plain

The idea operates within the modernist overall rejection of the aesthetics of ornamentalism, and traces Yeats's veering from the poetics of Romanticism into a more pronounced modernist aesthetics. In architecture, it is celebrated in Adolf Loo's well-known phrase “ornament is a crime” [(Quoted in J. Lubbock, *The Tyranny of Taste: The Politics of Architecture and Design in Britain 1550-1960* (New York: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 302)]. The assertion is disseminated later by Le Corbusier, *The Decorative Art of Today*. Yet it is important to show here that though Yeats and Loo converge on the aesthetics of nudity, they diverge fundamentally in so far as the ideological teleology of such aesthetics is concerned. Adolf Loo and Le Corbusier see it as a founding principle of modernity, a decisive move to enter the perfect world of the machine, a desire also shared by Italian Futurism; whereas Yeats's valuation of the aesthetics of “nakedness” rather stems from his conviction of its inter-relatedness with the simple and with authenticity – indisputably pre-modern in the Yeatsian philosophy. Where Adolf Loo associates ornamental aestheticism with racial and civilisational “degeneration”, Yeats links it with entangling “embroideries” which hamper the self from discovering and expressing authentic realities about subject and object. In brief, if Loo's stance is celebratory of modernity and the machine, then Yeats unequivocally rejects such an epistemological project.

⁵ See Richard Ellmann, *The Identity of Yeats* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975 [1954]), p. 14

⁶ Quoted in Ellmann, *Identity*, p. 13.

⁷ For more comment on Yeats's aestheticisation of Irish Landscapes see Daniel Harris, *Yeats: Coole Park and Ballylee* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974).

⁸ Richard Ellmann, *The Man and the Masks*, p. 52. Yet Ellmann reads the poem as an autobiographical allegory tracing Yeats's own odyssean sailing from one aesthetic tradition to another.

⁹ Edward Said, "Yeats and Decolonisation" in *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993).

¹⁰ Yeats, *Uncollected Prose*, eds. JP Frayne and C Johnson, Vol 1, (London: Macmillan, 1970-75), p. 224.

¹¹ Yeats, "Ireland and the Arts" in *Essays and Introductions* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1961), pp. 205-6.

¹² Yeats, *Autobiographies*, pp. 471-72

¹³ Yeats, *Autobiographies*, pp. 395-96

¹⁴ Yeats, *Essays*, p. 207

¹⁵ "Beauty is truth, truth beauty, - that is all/ Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know". Yet even this might be interpreted as a political stance in which the worldly – exteriority – is subsumed by an idealisation of the autonomy of art or aesthetic autotelicism. The idea is also Yeatsian. If it is kept muffled at the beginning by hybridising it with the idea of the nation and nationalism, then it will erupt with force and violence in the later poetry, and substantiate itself into an assertive philosophy of pure aesthetic autonomy and redemption.

¹⁶ Yeats, *Essays*, p. 519.

¹⁷ Bloom, *Yeats*, p. 55.

¹⁸ Yeats, *Essays*, p. 520.

¹⁹ Ellmann, *The Man and the Masks*, pp. 49-51.

²⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen Lane, prefaced by Michel Foucault (London: Athlone Press, 1984 [c1977]), p. 6.

²¹ Ellmann, *The Man and the Masks*, p. 51.

²² Yeats devalues *allegoria* because he links it with the rise of mercantilism and the "Middle Class" in England. In a letter to Lady Gregory: "I had no sooner begun reading in the British Museum after my return when it flashed upon me that the coming of Allegory coincided with the rise of the Middle Class. That it was the first effect on literature of the earnest spirit which afterwards created Puritanism. I have been hunting through all sorts of books to verify this and am now certain of it". (*Letters*, p. 386).

²³ Yeats has learned from O'Leary that "a man must not cry in public to save a nation" (*Essays*, p. 247).

²⁴ Yeats, *Essays*, p. 246.

²⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983), p. 15. Anderson defines the nation as "an imagined political community – and imagined as inherently limited and sovereign".

²⁶ For further comment on this issue, see Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), see also Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (New York: OUP, 1967).

²⁷ To know more about fascist writings in which mysticism is conflated with politics, see Roger Griffin, *Fascism* (New York: OUP, 1995).

²⁸ For more knowledge on the fallacy of nationalisms' grand narratives, see Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1993 [1960]), and Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983).

²⁹ See K Hoppen, *Ireland since 1800 Conflict and Conformity* (London: Longman, 1989), and FSL Lyons, *Ireland since the Famine* (London: Wridenfeld and Nicolson, 1971).

³⁰ Yeats, *Uncollected Prose*, Vol 2, p. 455

³¹ Edward Said, "Yeats and Decolonisation" in *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993), pp. 265-87.

³² Edward Said and Johnson Hutchinson unambiguously support this argument. Said concedes that Yeats is a poet of de-colonisation, whereas Hutchinson emphasises that he is "the leading propounder of this Anglo-Irish *Weltanschauung*". See E Said, "Yeats and Decolonisation" in *Culture and Imperialism*, and J Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: The Gaelic Revival and The Creation of the Irish Nation State* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987).

³³ Yeats's most consequential text in forging the imagination of the Easter insurrection is indisputably his play *Cathleen ni Houlihan*. For Constance Markievicz, one of the artificers of the Easter Rising, the play was "a sort of gospel". Stephen Gwynn wrote in *Irish Literature and Drama*: "The effect of *Cathleen ni Houlihan* on me was that I went home asking myself if such plays should be produced unless one was prepared for people to go out to shoot and be shot. Yeats was not alone responsible; no doubt but Lady Gregory had helped him to get the peasant speech so perfect; but above all Miss Goone's impersonation had stirred the audience as I had never seen another audience stirred". Quoted in A Norman Jeffares, *A Commentary on the Collected Poems of WB Yeats* (London: Macmillan Press, 1979), p. 512.