

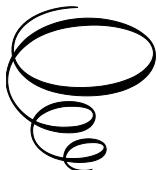
The Gyroscopic Transformation of Self Quest in W. B. Yeats's Poetry

The Gyroscopic Transformation of Self Quest in W. B. Yeats's Poetry

By

Özlem Saylan

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



The Gyroscopic Transformation of Self Quest in W. B. Yeats's Poetry

By Özlem Saylan

This book first published 2018

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2018 by Özlem Saylan

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-5275-1419-6

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-1419-5

To My Daddy and Mom

“A little learning is a dangerous thing.
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian Spring;
There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,
and drinking largely sobers us again.”

— *An Essay on Criticism*, Alexander Pope - 1711

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	ix
Acknowledgements	xi
Introduction	1
Chapter One.....	9
<i>Pulchritudo</i> : Transcendental Self Quest in the Early Period (1889-1910)	
Chapter Two	31
<i>Violentia</i> : Fall of Self in the Middle Period (1910-1928)	
Chapter Three	51
<i>Temptatio</i> : Odyssey of Equilibrium in the Late Period (1928-1938)	
Chapter Four.....	67
<i>Sapientia</i> : Gyroscopic Turn of Self Quest in the Later Period (1938-1939)	
Conclusion.....	83
Bibliography	87
Index.....	95

PREFACE

This book aims to identify the relationship between self quest and poetry in the selected poems of William Butler Yeats, and to explore the gyroscopic—returning to the initial phase to unite end with beginning—transformation of self and quest in those poems influenced by late-Romantic and early-Modernist verse. Apart from the lyrical change at the dawn of the 20th century, self—with desire for knowledge—goes through a gyroscopic quest of *The Great Wheel*'s four phases: respectively *Pulchritudo* (inner beauty), *Violentia* (ferocity), *Temptatio* (temptation) and *Sapientia* (wisdom), from light to darkness and subjectivity to objectivity. During the gyroscopic quest, self discovers anti-self, and by harmonically uniting the antithetical edges, in Yeatsian terms “gyres” of life such as death and birth; past and future; dark and light; tragedy and gaiety; time and eternity; immanent and transcendent—one is waxing and the other one is waning—makes quest eternal. With regard to the late-Romantic period, first, it is demonstrated that the mythological past and cultural heritage of Ireland are used to revive the transcendental Celtic Ireland. Secondly, it is revealed that the earlier dreamy tone, the elaborated language, and the subjective themes, especially after the political and scientific developments all around the world, are replaced with more complicated themes and plain language. Thirdly, it is observed that the early-Modernist period brings along a questioning tone, a more direct choice of wording, and the depiction of real event and places, and a symbolist language. Finally, the focus is directed to the transition from symbolism to imagism and self quest's gyroscopic turn. The ultimate aim of this book is to shed light on self quest and harmonically united antithetical structures in Yeats's selected poems.

When the poems are thoroughly analysed in the frame of self quest, it can be observed that there is a transition from the desire for national unity towards individuality which is the first level of self-fulfilment. In other words, self realizes that it comes into existence with multiple layers and in every layer it confronts other selves who are pursuing different desires such as nationality, individuality, knowledge, freedom, wisdom, harmony, truth, sublimity, etc. After leaving behind the nationality desire, self awakens. In order to understand and accept all the sides of the essence, it notices that every burden or desire should be eased. Only then, can self-realization happen. However, this does not mean that self quest ends.

When the self-realization is actualized, quest goes on. Otherwise, it is not possible to continue.

For the most part, this book endeavours to point out one of the oldest struggles in the history of humanity; self struggles to find out the other selves, in other words to realize self-fulfilment and continues to the quest.

In a nutshell, it can be stated that with the aim of a humble contribution to the field of English Literature *The Gyroscopic Transformation of Self Quest in W. B. Yeats's Poetry* intends to highlight the importance of self quest and its gyroscopic phases in W. B. Yeats's poems through the current literary movements and the influence of the historical events of the period. After the analyses, it is possible to express that man has been in a quest to actualize his being on Earth and to maintain this struggle self has to be recognized thoroughly. The way to recognize self is possible so as to be freed from all the burdens which connect, in other words tie the self. In Yeats's poetry, self beginning its quest from light reaches the darkness which holds the light in it. When it reaches the darkness, the first level of self-recognition is completed, and the other level starts. As long as self continues the quest, recognition continues as well.

Özlem SAYLAN
Denizli, 2018

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the very first place, I would like to do my best to express my utmost gratitude to Assist. Prof. Dr. Şeyda SİVRİOĞLU who has been much, much more than just a mentor since the beginning of my study. Her remarkable feedback has enriched this book. I would like to extend my appreciation to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mehmet Ali ÇELİKEL whose warm dimpled smile and wide-open door are the first and still vivid shots from PAU. Another invaluable pathfinder of my journey is Assist. Prof. Dr. Cumhur Yılmaz MADRAN whose wisdom enabled me to study more and more. I also want to underline the contribution of Assist. Prof. Dr. Sezer Sabriye İKİZ and the motivation of my colleagues who are more than friends in KTU and BATU with their fellowship and guidance. Additionally, I am deeply indebted to all my lecturers whose cultural background and extensive knowledge I have benefited from throughout my BA and MA education from Pamukkale, Ege, Jagiellonian, Selçuk and Karadeniz Technical University.

My mother. To whom I owe a debt of gratitude. I could not have succeeded without her affectionate love and prayers. And of course, my late father. I believe that he is still with me not just during my studies but in every step of my life. One final appreciation goes to my brothers whose unconditional assistance gave me the courage to write in my way.

It remains for me to acknowledge the precious contributions of my editor and proofreader Siobhán Denham for her time and energy as well as her helpful remarks.

This book is a revised version of the master thesis funded with the support from the 2016SOBE009 numbered project of Scientific Research Projects and Funds of PAMUKKALE UNIVERSITY, TURKEY.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the first existence of human beings on Earth, the desire to know and consequently the need for quest—whether for the sake of wisdom, eternity, delight, sublimity, or some other purposes—have been a matter of issue in almost all fields. Sometimes this urge has pushed men into the maze of the inner world of the psyche, sometimes into a struggle against nature, and sometimes even into a challenge against God. Regardless of the consequences, by pushing the limits of being human, man has been successful in getting beyond the boundaries and reaching other worlds in which self meets other selves.

The fundamental aim of this book is to illustrate self quest—one of the situational archetypes—and the transformation of self and the quest in the selected poems of William Butler Yeats's (1865-1939) poetry *oeuvre* with the help of regenerative reading of gyre¹ and *The Great Wheel*.² In the light of this study, the relationship between poetic discourse and the path of self quest is unearthed. Starting from complete “subjectivity”³ which corresponds to *Pulchritudo*⁴ in *The Great Wheel* and the wanderings of self in ancient Celtic transcendent gardens of the otherworld.⁵ Then the path

¹ A geometrical term—“circling movement beginning at the tip of a cone and expanding to the board end; it reverses and contracts back, changing the direction of spin, or pern”—initially used by Yeats as an image, later adopted as a symbol which turns into a metaphor in general perspective. Throughout this book, it will be used to refer to the harmony of dualistic unity in the self quest. Moreover, the gyre “involve(s) the living and the dead in interactive conflict, as well as past and present, time and eternity, self and other, face and mask.” Robert Welch (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Irish Literature*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1996, p. 232.

² A lunar system based on birth, death and rebirth cycle of life in twenty-eight phases. For the image see W. B. Yeats, *A Vision*, Palgrave Macmillan Company, Toronto, 1962. p. 66. [Hereinafter referred to as *AV*].

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 73-76.

⁴ One of the Latin terms that Yeats used in *The Great Wheel*, meaning “inner beauty,” and it corresponds to the self quest’s first period ideal referring to the seeking of the beautiful ancient Ireland.

⁵ Transcendent domain of deities, supernatural beings, fairies and the dead in Celtic mythology. To Yeats, “in Ireland this world and the world we go to after death are not far apart.” W. B. Yeats, *The Celtic Twilight*, The Project Gutenberg, EBook, 2003, p. 34.

follows *Violentia*,⁶ waning subjectivity, leading to the fall from the transcendent⁷ gardens of Ireland—"the home of ancient idealism"⁸—because of modernity and its impact on human life. Later, the quest proceeds to *Temptatio*,⁹ waxing objectivity, of body and old age anxiety where man¹⁰ finds himself in limbo between two worlds: the mortal and the transcendent world. The next part of the quest is complete objectivity—*Sapientia*¹¹—with darkness holding the light inside. Considering these, in Yeatsian poetry, self quest's movement is cyclical, in other words gyroscopic¹² rather than linear. In addition, the genesis of following a four-phase transformation shows similarity with the process of *The Great Wheel* phases, which are simultaneously scrutinized with the lyrical change of each poetic phase.

Ireland, geographically "being isolated from the world allowed [her] to create [her] own literature which, composed of ancient myths, legends,

⁶ One of the Latin terms used in *The Great Wheel* meaning ferocity and throughout this study it refers to the manifestation of the fall of self from the transcendent sphere.

⁷ Throughout this book, the word is used refer to the realm where free souls find a chance to internalize their existences by uniting death with life, evil with good etc. in harmony and peace.

⁸ Maria Camelia Dicu, "The World in its Times. A Study of Yeats's Poetic Discourse versus the Concept of History", (PhD Thesis, University of Craiova, 2013) European Scientific Institute Publishing, Kocani, p. 81.

⁹ One of the Latin words used *The Great Wheel* meaning temptation, and in this study it is used for the equilibrium between approaching death and the distant memory of youth.

¹⁰ Throughout this book, the word will be used for both woman and man.

¹¹ One of the Latin terms used in the fourth quarter of *The Great Wheel* corresponding to wisdom and in this book, it refers to the knowledge derived from the dualities' harmonic unity in the self quest's last phase.

¹² "Gyroscopes are physical sensors that detect and measure the angular motion of an object relative to an inertial frame of reference. [Over their 200-year history, they have been used in sea navigation and aviation.] The term "gyroscope" is attributed to the mid-19th century French physicist Leon Foucault who named his experimental apparatus for earth's rotation observation by joining two Greek roots: *gyros*-rotation and *skopeein*-to see. Unlike rotary encoders or other sensors of relative angular motion, the unique feature of gyroscopes is the ability to measure the absolute motion of an object without any external infrastructure or reference signals." Alexander A. Trusov, "Overview of MEMS Gyroscopes: History, Principles of Operations, Types of Measurements", (PhD Thesis, University of California, 2011), p. 2. In this book, the term thought to be adapted for the gyre symbol of Yeats, is used by the author to symbolize self's cyclical movements which are independent and at the same time interdependent during the quest.

and folklore,”¹³ was the “mythical queen”¹⁴ Ériu’s¹⁵ faery land for Celtic people. Her folk lived under the unity of a Celtic nation and spoke the same language for some centuries.¹⁶ “Before the arrival of the English, various tribes had inhabited Ireland. They were the Firbolgs, the Fomorians, the Tuatha De Danann, the Milesians, the Celts,¹⁷ and migrants from Scotland.”¹⁸ However, in time, due to scientific and technological advances combined with wars, the consequent irrecoverable political devastation in almost every facet of life, Ireland’s political face changed. Once an independent nation, Ireland became a colony of the more powerful government of England and amenable to a transformation in terms of her language—which is “a vehicle of false consciousness, a veil of rationality, a means of knowing, classifying, and quantifying the self and the external that hide the fundamental irrationality of a world”¹⁹—history, belief, literature, and culture. That is to say, Ireland’s transformation, like her geographic shape which is narrow first and widens downward, and then gets narrow again, is gyroscopic in that she was a free nation, corresponding to the wide part of a gyre, experienced a fall and had to fight to be a nation again, from the narrowest point. Then, when she was at the widest position in terms of national unity, another cycle of the gyre started with famines, rebellions and wars in and around the country. In this climate, her transformation showed a waning movement. In the frame of

¹³ Mohammed Abdulkageed Hassan, “Mysticism in William Butler Yeats’ Selected Plays” (Master Thesis, Süleyman Demirel University, 2015), p. 40.

¹⁴ Lester I. Conner, *A Yeats Dictionary*, Syracuse University Press, New York, 1998, p. 53.

¹⁵ “Gaelic Celts invaded Ireland, which they called Ériu (Erin), [Gaelic goddess of the land] in about 350 B.C.” Edward Malins, *A Preface to Yeats*, Longman, London, 1974, p. 24.

¹⁶ “By the sixth century the Gaulish language [ancient Celtic language] was everywhere extinct, without having left behind a single record of its literature. The same fate was shared by all Celtic nationalities of the Continent, and by those numerous Germanic tribes that were conquered by Rome or came within the sphere of the later Roman civilisation.” Kuno Meyer, *Ancient Irish Poetry*, Constable and Company Limited, London, 1994, p. viii.

¹⁷ “The people who live scattered over Europe while Gaelic are the ones who live in Ireland. Therefore, ‘The Celtic’ is a broader concept than ‘the Gaelic’”. Sung Sook Hong, “Reconciliation Strategies in Yeats’s and Heaney’s Poems”, *The Yeats Journal of Korea*, Vol. 46, (2015), p. 135.

¹⁸ Bc. Lenka Smidova, “Irish Folk Tales and Legends: A Modern Translation” (Master Thesis, Masaryk University, 2009), p. 5.

¹⁹ (qtd. in) Rob Doggett, *Deep-Rooted Things: Empire and Nation in the Poetry and Drama of William Butler Yeats*, University of Notre Dame Press, Indiana, 2006, p. 128.

this book, Irish poet, W. B. Yeats's poetry is used to mirror Ireland's cultural history, sometimes by personalizing her with mythological characters like the young lover Niamh, the warrior Cuchulain, the leader Cumhal, the god of transformation Fand, the sea-rider Oisin, the king Fergus, the last pagan king Dathi²⁰ and sometimes concretizing with natural images or animals such as rose, bird, beast, wind, bough, peahen, dew, etc. The most suitable indicators in this respect are exemplified in terms of self, quest, Ireland, and the gyroscopic phases of the self quest.

Although the poems do not explicitly belong to any literary movement on the surface, Yeats's poetry career chronologically ranges from the late-Romantic period (1850-1900) to the early-Modernist (1900-1916) period. Especially his early and late poetry—"quite simply more public, more directly embroiled in the political debates of the day, than Yeats's early efforts"²¹—carry some of the traces of these periods in terms of themes and stylistic respect. However, "one should read *Yeats's Collected Poems* in much the same way one reads a novel, beginning at the beginning and going through the text in the order in which the author set it down."²² So, in this book, selected poems from the whole *oeuvre* are divided into four parts based on their chronological order, and literary patterns. The first quarter features the early poems which reflect beauty in context. The second quarter consists of the middle period poetry whose language is less figurative but more complicated. The third quarter is formed by the late period poems with an ironic tone and the themes reflect equilibrium. Finally, the fourth quarter comprises the last period poems which symbolize the harmonic unity of dualities.

In the first chapter, the quest desire of self and the first phase of its gyroscopic transformation is depicted via *The Great Wheel* and gyre. The transcendental landscape of Ireland and its reflection on the poetic atmosphere are given within the context of the first group of poems which range from 1889 to 1910 consisting of four books: *Crossways* (1889), *The Rose* (1893), *The Wind among the Reeds* (1899), and *In the Seven Woods* (1904). In this period, Celtic myths, faery and folk tales have major roles in Yeats's poetic material possibly due to the influence of the Irish patriots' contemporary project on reviving national unity and Yeats's

²⁰ L. I. Conner, *YD*, p. 45.

²¹ Charles I. Armstrong, *Reframing Yeats: Genre, Allusion and History*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London, 2013, p. 28.

²² John Unterecker, *A Reader's Guide to William Butler Yeats*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1988, p. a note.

“strenuous efforts to reawaken and to preserve the national memory”²³ by means of the Irish Literary Renaissance of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Thus, pagan-Ireland’s culture is used to resurrect the pristine unified soul of the nation and to create “[...] the poetic awakening in Ireland.”²⁴ In other words, “in order to escape British culture and form its own identity, Ireland has to go back to pre-colonial times.”²⁵ Hence, some mythical protagonists and antagonists are revived in the literary works, faery and human voices are fused; references are given to archaic place names, the mortals’ realm and the hazel woods²⁶ are deliberately intersected; and thus the quest and the gyroscopic phases are started within the frame of the Irish national unity ideal: *Pulchritudo*. Likewise, a gyre geometrically starts from the bottom, and waxes towards its zenith. The self quest follows a fractional transformation which springs from the lowest point of self-fulfilment and reaches a wider circle in every level of its development. That is to say, the early period is the widest part of the poetry in terms of cultural material which hosts several mythological characters, fairies, legendary stories and ballad-like structure in the poems. However, it is the narrowest part of the self quest with regard to self-development. In this period, self is hidden under the nationality ideal. It is not awakened yet.

The next chapter, covering the years 1910-1928 with four books: *The Green Helmet and Other Poems* (1910), *Responsibilities* (1914), *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1919), and *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921), transforms the previous transcendental landscape into a fallen garden with its word selection, verse structure, and themes related to modern Ireland. The fall is necessary for the rise; therefore, *Pulchritudo* can be identified as the trigger and *Violentia* can be referred to as the initial phase of the quest. In this phase, the post-Romantic Yeatsian tone and the quest slough the Romantic aspect to show the early-Modernist patterns in response to the political events which globally strike not only diplomacy but also science, literature, and art. The dreamy Irisher self seeks realities rather

²³ Michael J. Sidnell, *Yeats's Poetry and Poetics*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 1996, p. 98.

²⁴ Ernest Boyd, *Ireland's Literary Renaissance*, Allen Figgis, Dublin, 1968, p. 123.

²⁵ Sander Feys, “Cultural Nationalism in the Life and Work of William Butler Yeats: The Man Behind the Myth”, (Master Thesis, Ghent University, 2010), p. 30.

²⁶ In Celtic lore, hazel tree stands for wisdom; however, in Yeats’s poems hazel woods refer to the place for quest. Also, the direction of the quest appears repetitiously from the mortal world towards hazel woods: “I went out to the hazel wood, / Because a fire was in my head,” Peter Allt, and Russell K. Alspach (eds.), *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of William Butler Yeats*. The Macmillan Company, New York, 1957, p.149. [Hereafter referred to as *Variorum*]

than faery tales or heroic ballads. Rewriting some epics in verse form and using a national terminology are no longer useful for the resurrection, because of this self needs to break all the boundaries and leave Ireland behind to actualize the self-fulfilment. Due to this, some patriotic writers, including Douglas Hyde, James Joyce, Lady Gregory, George Russell, Sean O'Casey, George Moore, Alice Milligan, and J.M. Synge, apply a questioning and rebellious tone in their plays or poems. The mission of reviving "Irishism" meshes with the facts of modern Ireland, not with her legendary past. The descriptions turn into narrations of actual events and real places, and references turn to the renowned names. In this phase, self and quest have a tendency to violence which is a defence against the result of the political turmoil around and in Ireland. Self gets into the second phase of the quest: *Violentia*. The myths and archaic legends of Ireland become a "forgotten beauty"²⁷ buried under the wreckage of wars and rebels in and around the country. Also, in this phase, the gyre waxes with the lyrical change towards another gyre—the dualistic structure of *The Great Wheel* causes the creation of two gyres which simultaneously move together and towards each other.

The third chapter is a description of the equilibrium between the quest's levels in terms of the anxiety of approaching old age, subsequent death and the distant memory of youth. The chapter encompasses the years between 1928 and 1938 with three books: *The Tower* (1928), *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1933), and *Parnell's Funeral and Other Poems* (1935). The frame of this period is shaped by *The Great Wheel's Temptatio* quarter. In other words, self has difficulty in stabilizing the equilibrium of life. In this phase, self and quest follow the way of the waning gyre towards the previous gyre's waxing point. In the poems, almost all the Irish legendary and folkloric materials die away in this phase, and the individual quest culminates in the seeking of a centre—a never-ending way of self-fulfilment. Under the influence of the early-Modernist period, self is portrayed as climbing up the winding stairs of the tower of entity, and the lines demonstrate the transformation: "We were the last romantics [...] / But all is changed [...]." ²⁸ Time is emphasized but not lamented because of the fact that the dual structure of life both requires death and birth, man and beast, peace and terror, natural and supernatural, self and anti-self, individual and nation, eternity and time, wise and fool who is different from the Shakespearean fool in that "Yeats's fool perceives his own [folly]."²⁹ This antithetical pattern of life and the

²⁷ See the poem *He Remembers Forgotten Beauty* on *Variorum* pp. 155, 56.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 491, 92.

²⁹ M. J. Sidnell, *YPP*, p. 119.

changing verse structure, from symbolism, “(saying) things that could not be said so perfectly in any other way”³⁰ to imagism, construct the core philosophy of the third chapter’s poetry.

The next chapter, 1938-1939, is comprised of only one book *Last Poems* (1938). According to *The Great Wheel’s Sapientia* phase, the poems hark back to the early period where the harmonic unity of the past is aimed at. However, with this phase, self accepts that the past—“both the historic and pre-history”³¹—is possible with the present. While the quest moves gyroscopically to the starting point, self becomes more mature and enlightened with complete “objectivity”.³² On the other hand, self seeks a way to maintain the quest eternally. The reality of death’s inescapability obliges self to find ways to confront it. Therefore, self and quest turn their faces to the first point and try to unite the two diachronous transformation phases. This uniformity consists of the junctures of two gyres which have been forming from the beginning of the quest. Likewise, when the last phase comes, self meets anti-self, and from this meeting the entity completes its essence. Yet, the quest does not end.

When all is considered, it can be expressed that there is a relationship between self quest which has been one of the starting points for most scientific and social researches across the centuries, and poetry based on the oral background of almost all civilizations. Ancient bards travelled from village to village and read eulogies, ballads, and epics, or sang songs by heart in front of the people. In the same way, actors and actresses rehearsed rituals, performances and plays by heart. They were able to memorize the texts with the aid of the rhymed and metric verse structures. So, it can be asserted that self and self quest’s alliance of poetry dates to the ancient works such as *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, *The Aeneid*, *The Odyssey*, *Beowulf*, *The Divine Comedy*, and *Paradise Lost*.

The self quest finds its way gyroscopically in Yeats’s poetry and self is divided into multiple essences. These essences—in Yeatsian terms, *tinctures*³³—move antithetically. While one waxes, the other wanes.

³⁰ Horatio Sheafe Krans, *William Butler Yeats and the Irish Literary Revival*, Leopold Classic Library, London, 1905, p. 162.

³¹ Uta von Reinersdorff-Paczensky Tenczin. “William Butler Yeats’s Poetry and Drama between Late Romanticism and Modernism: An Analysis of Yeats’s Poetry and Drama”, *Peter Lang Pub Inc.*, Frankfurt, Vol. 320. 1996, p. 123.

³² *AV*, pp. 73-76.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

Affected by these movements, Yeats's poetry is shaped by the conflicted³⁴ pattern of these essences and *The Great Wheel* consisting of twenty-eight phases, and also its dual structures are put into the core of the poems. While going through these twenty-eight phases, self transforms beginning with one self and ending with multiple selves.

In summary, this book aims to show, through the selected poems of W. B. Yeats, that poetry is one of the ancient disciplines that mirrors not only self but also self quest. Moreover, in the frame of this book, it is illustrated that self is not a single entity³⁵ but has multiple layers, and it is inside a quest in which it experiences simultaneous transformations with every phase of the antithetical structure of gyroscopic movements. Besides, the way of the quest is cyclical, yet, it is not a vicious cycle, since, in life, every end is a phase of a beginning and every beginning is a phase of an end. Likewise, "Alcemon, a pupil of Pythagoras, thought that men die because they cannot join their beginning and their end. Their serpent³⁶ has not its tail in its mouth."³⁷

³⁴ Throughout this book, the word is consciously used not for anarchy but for harmony which is complementarily created by the gyroscopic movements of the binary essences or entities.

³⁵ See David Hume's "bundle theory".

³⁶ *Ouroboros*, depicted in the 3rd Century by Cleopatra the Alchemist, is "the ancient symbol depicting a snake swallowing its own tail, thus creates the form of a perfect circle. Its etymological roots can be found in Ancient Greek where *oura* means tail and *boros* means the one who devours [...]. Deities or semi-deities of various cultures have been depicted in the form of *Ouroboros*, for instance in Norse mythology [As Jörmungandr, one of Loki's (the deity of mischief) sons], in Aztec and Toltec mythology [The semi-deity Quetzalcoatl] and in Hindu [the dragon circling the tortoise that carries on its shell the four elephants which hold up the world on their backs] and Ashanti folklore [The demi-god Aidophedo]. However, [...] the most famous representation of the *Ouroboros* is the one found in the text "The Chrysopoeia of Cleopatra" dating to Alexandria [period]. In this drawing, the *Ouroboros* encloses the words ἑν, τὸ πᾶν [pronounced as hen, to pan], which is translated as "one, the all", i.e. "All is one", referring us back to the idea of unity, cyclicity and integration [of black and white, life and death, beginning and end of gyres.]" Panos Merkouris, "Debating the Ouroboros of International Law: The Drafting History of Article 31 (3) (c)", *International Community Law Review*, Vol. 9/1, 2007, pp. 1-2.

³⁷ (qtd. in) *AV*, pp. 68, 69.

CHAPTER ONE

PULCHRITUDO: TRANSCENDENTAL SELF QUEST IN THE EARLY PERIOD (1889-1910)

“The immortals are mortal,
the mortals immortal:
each living in the other’s death,
and dying in the other’s life.”¹

Quest and self are two of the most frequently collocated terms in literature since literature has an oral background gathered mostly from legends which “determine the unified society,”² ballads, mythologies, primeval rituals, and epics of the self quest. Since antiquity, man has been in search of an expression for the meaning of creation, natural events, death, truth etc.:

New dreams, new dreams; there is no truth
Saving in thine own heart. Seek, then,
No learning from the starry men,
Who follow with the optic glass
The whirling ways of stars that pass—
Seek, then, for this is also sooth,³

In the simplest terms, quest is a kind of dream which takes its source from the inner world. Scientists—the people referred to as starry men with their technological devices in the poem—provide only pure knowledge; it

¹ See Greek philosopher Heraclitus’s *Homeric Questions—On Nature*, Fragment D 67.

² Lenka Pokorna, “Celtic Elements in Yeats’s Early Poetry and their Influence on Irish National Identity” (Master Thesis, Masaryk University, 2012), p. 21.

³ *Variorum*, p. 66.

is the individual who is responsible for going after that desire, truth, comfort, dream so on, and so forth.

In a traditional quest archetype, a hero has a task to fulfil, and quest is completed when the quester reaches the goal on behalf of society's perpetuity; however, in Yeats's early poems, the conventional quest and the idealized hero are deconstructed. In his poetry, the quest is not completed; on the contrary, the main task—if there is any—is to start the quest and unite its end with the beginning. On the other hand, in his poems “the hero becomes godlike as the gods become human.”⁴ The traditional heroic adventures correspond to the transformation of self which can simply be explained as an entity with multilayers, and they transform phase by phase during the quest. So,

Yeats gives a vivid description of a group of legendary Irish nobles and warriors including poet and warrior Oisin, leader of heroes King Goll, poet and leader of heroes Fergus and warrior Cuchulain, who are all national heroes [...]. But different from the historical heroes praised by the patriotic national poets who were also Yeats's predecessors, Yeats's heroes lack a strong sense of contemporaneity, and are multifaceted. They usually end their story as failed questers or with madness.⁵

In a typical Yeatsian quest, a hero does not necessarily have to be strong. What this means is that self confronts the other self but not monsters or tricksters, and he is mortal because Yeats's characters are from ordinary people that make them deficient in supernatural powers. Also, the direction of the quest is cyclical; in other words, gyroscopic “turning and turning”—“the use of the gerund in ‘turning’, ‘ing’ gives an open period, no limit for the corruption and the destruction”⁶—like a “widening gyre”⁷ because it is a never-ending search returning to the beginning and starting again. By doing that the hero struggles to find equilibrium between the inner and outer world for the sake of self-fulfilment. Hence,

⁴ Alex Zwerdling, *Yeats and the Heroic Ideal*, New York University Press, New York, 1965, p. 147.

⁵ Yue Zhao and Lihui Liu, “On the Idealized Landscape in Early Yeats”, *English Language and Literature Studies*, (2014 Nov), Vol. 4/4, p. 96.

⁶ Khader T. Khader, “William Butler Yeats' ‘The Second Coming’: A Stylistic Analysis”, *IUG Journal of Humanities Research*, Vol. 24/1, (2015, May), p. 30.

⁷ *Variorum*, p. 401.

the most obvious fact about the Yeatsian hero is that he has not made his peace with the modern world. Industrialisation, secularism, democracy, the state itself strike him as alien, as the enemy. He not only longs for a simpler, more primitive world but frequently seems to be unaware of its disappearance. In this sense, many of Yeats's heroes are distinctly different from the anti-heroes of so much modern fiction. They seldom waste their time quarrelling directly with the society they reject; they fashion for themselves an alternate, imaginary heroic world in which they do have a place. This is one of the reasons why so many of the characters in Yeats's poems and plays are connected with a dead civilization or a dying one: ancient Greece, Celtic Ireland, the eighteenth century, or the decadent modern aristocracy. [...] For Yeats, the word 'heroic' referred neither to a man nor to a situation taken in isolation, but rather to a specific human reaction to the specific situation to defeat.⁸

The quest desire has forced people to fictionalize stories and narrate them to each other in verse form thanks for the convenience of recitation. Consequently, the aim to ensoul the quest causes the emergence of poetry which is "a kind of ritual, [and] an effort to share the mystical moment, to create a semblance of one's own experience [...]"⁹ and also it "is the most condensed and concentrated form of literature."¹⁰ Likewise, in the past "the quest of the twentieth-century man for identity is the internalization of a primary search for a centre whose axis is located inside himself,"¹¹ and that is why in Yeats's poetry self quest is one of the most frequently reiterated patterns. In other words, "poetry or more specifically, writing itself, was Yeats's ready-to-hand immortality, an atemporal dimension within which one could be reborn again and again"¹² because poetry springs from life and life is made up of a struggle, a story of finding the centre:

... *I will my heavy story tell
Till my own words, re-echoing, shall send
Their sadness through a hollow, pearly heart;
And my own tale again for me shall sing.*

⁸ A. Zwerdling, *YHI*, pp. 8, 9.

⁹ Joan S. Carberg, "A Vision by William Butler Yeats", *Daedalus/MIT Press Journal*, 1974, Vol. 103, No. 1, p. 155.

¹⁰ Thomas R. Arp and Greg Johnson (eds.), *Perrine's Literature-Structure, Sound, and Sense-Poetry*, Thomson Wadsworth Publishing, Boston, 2006, p. 653.

¹¹ Rajeshwari Patel, *The Ideal of "Unity of Being"*, Mehra Offset Press, New Delhi, 1990, p. 155.

¹² Vereen M. Bell, *Yeats and the Logic of Formalism*, University of Missouri Press, Missouri, 2006, p. 109.

*And my own whispering words be comforting,
And lo! my ancient burden may depart.¹³*

In the poem above, the speaker reveals that carrying a story to tell is the “ancient burden” of the speaker, and it is one of the characteristics of self quest because a journey requires recognition of the whole aspects of self and the other self. The enjambment¹⁴ used in the poem supports the idea that the speaker has something to tell, yet there is a hesitation in the speaker’s tone and the sentences as if the words are going to flee. Hence, Yeats’s poetry, especially the early period, nourishes from the battle between contraries of mind and intellect as well as body and soul which provide knowledge of self, (to Plotinus), which “is the author of all living things.”¹⁵ Because of this,

modern poet would like to get beyond deception, attempt to recover “radical innocence”, and restore the lost bearings of poetry. The fundamental problem is to discover a central, governing principle that can lend value to existence. The lack of informing centre, whether we call it a frame of reference, a *weltanschauung*, world picture, a received system of values, Degree of the Elizabethans, or what the Indians refer to as “Dharma Chakra” has a wide and varied impact on human life.¹⁶

Yeats, who is late for Romanticism and early for Modernism, says in *The Second Coming* that humanity experiences a non-centrality in the 20th century. The dualities deriving from past and present, human and divine, innocence and reality, nature and mortality, art and science, etc. are the underlying reason of this decentralization causing an existentialist problem. Hence, Yeats’s poems are mainly based on these conflicts which actually create the world.¹⁷ These conflicts lead to find a centre since, to Yeats, “we make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry.”¹⁸ However, it is not a new argument that everything in the universe exists because of its contrast, and this contradiction is not a negation,¹⁹ as Blake asserts, but a harmony. What is

¹³ *Variorum*, pp. 68, 69. Throughout this book the italicized font of the poems belongs to the poet.

¹⁴ A literary device used for when a sentence or a thought steps over from one line, couplet, or stanza to another without a pause or a punctuation mark.

¹⁵ (qtd. in) Donald A. Stauffer, “W. B. Yeats and the Medium of Poetry”, *ELH*, Vol. 15.3 (1948, Sept), p. 242.

¹⁶ R. Patel, *YIUB*, p. 11.

¹⁷ *AV*, p. 72.

¹⁸ W. B. Yeats, *Mythologies*, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1959, p. 331.

¹⁹ (qtd. in) *AV*, p. 72.

new with Yeats is that he with “murdering impossibilities”²⁰ builds on the idea that conflict brings unity along with harmony, and it offers a way to find the self and other possible selves because “[...] all the gains of man come from conflict with the opposite of his true being.”²¹

In the poem *The Cloak, the Boat, and the Shoes*, self and anti-self—one of the entities of human existence and this pair is one of “the dialectical terms used by critics when discussing Yeats”²²—engage in a catechetical dialogue depicted with the union of dark and light:

‘What do you make so fair and bright?
 ‘I make the cloak of Sorrow:
 O lovely to see in all men’s sight
 Shall be the cloak of Sorrow,
 In all men’s sight.’

‘What do you build with sails for flight?’

‘I build a boat for Sorrow:
 O swift on the seas all day and night
 Saileth the rover Sorrow,
 All day and night.’

‘What do you weave with wool so white?’

‘I weave the shoes of Sorrow:
 Soundless shall be the footfall light
 In all men’s ears of Sorrow,
 Sudden and light.’²³

The *primary* self,²⁴ which is “reasonable and moral” in the quest, seeks for the “actual facts of outward things” with “objectivity.”²⁵ Thus, it asks questions about the function of Sorrow and tries to perceive the contradiction it creates. In the quest, on the other hand, the *antithetical* self, which is “emotional and aesthetic”, reflects “desire and imagination

²⁰ Donald A. Stauffer, “YMP”, p. 246.

²¹ Ibid., p. 13.

²² David Pierce, *Yeats’s Worlds: Ireland, England, and the Poetic Imagination*, Yale University Press, London, 1995, p. 1.

²³ *Variorum*, pp. 69, 70.

²⁴ Yeats describes the spirit as a concept with two basic *tinctures*: *primary* and *antithetical*. Because “all physical reality, the universe as a whole, every solar system, every atom, is a double cone [...]” *AV*, p. 69.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 73.

of the inner world” with subjectivity.²⁶ It answers three²⁷ questions by personalizing Sorrow wearing a bright garment by which its appearance contradicts with its content. Its velocity, making it non-spatial and time independent, enables every man to see and hear Sorrow. As it is mentioned, self is not a single entity but exists with anti-self which makes identity a whole. In that,

the creation of this opposing image makes the frustration of the natural self a mode of transcendence, not through a knowledge revealed to and passively borne by the poet but through the deliberate transformation of nature into image, or, to use his own later word ‘emblem,’ it being the inescapable and determining function of the poet to effect this transformation.²⁸

Throughout his literary career, “Yeats felt that life and art should be founded on the dynamic relationship between actual self and created anti-self. [...]. In Yeats’s world, the ostensibly antithetical or disparate process by which art becomes life and life becomes art are made curiously interchangeable.”²⁹ He makes advantages of this conflict, especially the *antithetical* self’s aesthetic creativity in his works by merging the dualities in a harmonic way. “He developed a theory of poetry that would lead to a fuller realization of himself, relying on conflict as a formative principle of poetic expression. Yeats saw the inevitable discrepancy between art and life, and between his present and future self.”³⁰ Hence, he creates characters and makes them speak like Hic and Ille in *Ego Dominus Tuus* or My Soul and My Self in *A Dialogue of Self and Soul*. To him, “the dialogue between self and anti-self enacts the confluence of past and present”³¹ phases of the self quest. Therefore, “[...] the ‘anti-self’ can be understood as a projection of the unconscious mind; as such it is comprised of qualities which are opposite, in nature, to those of the

²⁶ *AV*, p.73.

²⁷ A sacred number in Celtic mythology which is used in dividing deities according to their symbols. Also, there is a three-headed hero deity Lugh, triple Goddess Brigid, goddess of poetry, healing and smithcraft and poet Athirne’s three magical cranes. Ireland’s symbol is also the trifoliated clover.

²⁸ M. J. Sidnell, *YPP*, p. 101.

²⁹ David G. Wright, *Yeats’s Myth of Self: The Autobiographical Prose*, Gill and Macmillan Ltd., Dublin, 1988, pp. 102, 103.

³⁰ R Patel, *YIUB*, p. 42.

³¹ James Longenbach, *Stone Cottage; Pound, Yeats & Modernism*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1988, p. 192.

personality, or conscious mind.”³² Understanding the self interdepends on understanding the anti-self. The union of these two *tinctures* leads to Yeatsian *Unity of Being*³³ which is simply to hypostatize the dark and bright sides of the psyche. It is inferential that Yeats’s art is based on the equilibrium of these sides because “the poet achieves Unity of Being when he finds his anti-self in an act of artistic creation.”³⁴

Experience, apart from the quest desire, is another medium of poetry in Yeats’s verse in that quest is full of experiences of conflicts such as soul and body, self and anti-self so on and so forth. If the contradictory structure of life is one of the main sources of poetry, then experience from that antithetical life provides poetic material as well. As Pietrzak quotes that “poetry must be rooted in experience to aspire to what Yeats called Unity of Being and Unity of Culture.”³⁵ *Unity of Being* which “is a momentary self-realization of the soul”³⁶ comprises of dualities. *Unity of Culture*, on the other hand, “[...] is constituted by the ability of an integrated self to direct every part of the whole toward a unified development.”³⁷ In *A Vision*, Yeats refers to his ideas on dualities which are based on experiences as “my instructors identify consciousness with conflict, not with knowledge, substitute for subject and object and their attendant logic a struggle towards harmony, towards Unity of Being.”³⁸ When self and anti-self is comprehended, *Unity of Being* is experienced, and a nation is required for *Unity of Culture*. In a way, Ireland once a unified culture, has still the possibility of gaining that united soul again and by reviving that, the country can reach *Unity of Culture* because “in man and race alike there is something called ‘Unity of Being’, using that term as Dante used it when he compared beauty in the *Convito* to a perfectly proportioned human body.”³⁹ Starting from this point, in

³² Stuart Hirschberg, “A Dialogue between Realism and Idealism in Yeats’s ‘Ego Dominus Tuus’”, *Colby Quarterly*, Vol. 11/2, (1975, Jun), p. 129.

³³ It is also one of the *Four Perfections*: Self-Sacrifice, Self-Knowledge, Unity of Being and Sanctity. *AV*, p. 100.

³⁴ Claude Julien Rawson (ed.), *Yeats and Anglo-Irish Literature*, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 1974, p. 53.

³⁵ (qtd. in) Wit Pietrzak, *Myth, Language and Tradition: A Study of Yeats, Stevens, and Eliot in the Context of Heidegger’s Search for Being*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle, 2011, p. 62.

³⁶ Alana J. White, “Symbolism in the Poetry of William Butler Yeats” (Master Thesis, Western Kentucky University, 1972), p. 13.

³⁷ R. Patel, *YIUB*, p. 57.

³⁸ *AV*, p. 214.

³⁹ W. B. Yeats, *The Autobiography of William Butler Yeats*, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1987, p. 128.

Yeatsian poetry, *Unity of Culture* and *Unity of Being* have a mutual relationship and they are a necessity. Every individual has multiple selves, and the body is perfectly proportioned in the frame of these selves. The more one recognizes the body, the greater the chance of reaching *Unity of Being* which leads to *Unity of Culture*.

If Yeats's poetic career is analysed in the frame of the historical background, it can be said that he starts his poetry career after the political turmoil of Ireland with England. In the 19th century, "in Yeats's early development two distinct motions of mind were in conflict: the first was the turn towards the Irish subject matter, and the second was the transcendence of the Irish style."⁴⁰ Considering these, it can be claimed that *Unity of Culture* is possible in a tranquil sphere transcending the real world and dwelling in a transcendent sphere where eternal beauty and everlasting joy exist, and "death or old age do not enter."⁴¹

The island dreams under the dawn
 And great boughs drop tranquillity;
 The peahens dance on a smooth lawn,
 A parrot sways upon a tree,
 Raging at his own image in the enamelled sea.⁴²

In most of the poems, themes of dualities balance and consequently a harmonic unity of contrast is pursued such as man and beast, past and present, dark and light, dream and reality, "swan and shadow"⁴³ so on and so forth but "the eternal conflict between body and soul, between heart and intellect was a major preoccupation of Yeats. He rejected the ascetic view on the subject and aimed at a synthesis of the two poles of human personality, which he saw as a union of opposites."⁴⁴ Likewise, in this poem, a tranquil island suddenly clashes with the rage of an animal accompanied by an enamelled sea. The juxtaposition of serenity with

⁴⁰ Allen R. Grossman, *Poetic Knowledge in the Early Yeats: A Study of 'The Wind among the Reeds'*, University Press of Virginia Charlottesville, Virginia, 1969, p. 9.

⁴¹ L. Pokorna, CEYEP, p. 43.

⁴² *Variorum*, p. 77.

⁴³ (qtd. in) Wonkyung Shin, "The Great Wheel and Byzantium Poems", *The Yeats's Journal of Korea*, Vol. 38, (2012), p. 174.

⁴⁴ Shamsul Islam, "The Influence of Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim Thought on Yeats's Poetry" (Master Thesis, McGill University, 1967), p. 24.

wrath reflects the “antithetical nature of the universe”⁴⁵ in the period which it makes easier to comprehend Yeats’s antithetical poetry structure.

To unite the contradictory *tinctures*, a geometrical shape gyre—the initial source of inspiration and “the essential element of growth and life, representing the cyclical nature of the Ultimate Reality with the recurrent pattern of growth and decay, ebb and flow”⁴⁶—is utilized. The gyre helps to explain the antithetical progress of the self quest which starts from *Pulchritudo* and moves towards *Violentia* following *Temptatio* and *Sapientia* as in the diagram of *The Great Wheel*. They move together and towards each other in that every phase is built on the previous phase’s experience and prepared for the next phase. During this gyroscopic process, the self quest follows a way that creates two gyres. Similarly, *Unity of Being*’s direction also rotates in that two antithetical things, self and anti-self, move together and towards each other and construct a gyroscopic shape because the *tinctures* are entwined, and this posture makes them united and one.⁴⁷ While the *primary tincture*—self—is waxing, the *antithetical tincture*—anti-self—is waning. On the contrary, while the *antithetical tincture* is waxing, the *primary tincture* is waning. One’s end means the beginning of the other’s. So,

Yeats’s “antithetical vision” could be said to have its origins in an ideology of conflict resolved by paradox. When he delights in conflict and antinomy, one can see him using the possibilities of language, the fictioneer’s ability to tell the truth while lying, to resolve in life without opting unequivocally for one side or the other. Thus, he creates linguistic, dramatic or imaginary resolutions of real and irresolvable dilemmas.⁴⁸

For instance, the poem *Ephemera* whose structure carries traces of Romanticism in terms of the subject matter of idealized love and embellishment in its language, is an example of this contradictory pattern. The title is an equivocation since the poet gives the impression of a minor subject, yet the poem consists of a dialogue between two lovers about ageing and love; two contradictory but universal and archaic themes in literature in terms of the gyres of love, waning, and old age,

⁴⁵ Donald Richard Theail, “William Butler Yeats: The Development of a Philosophy through Imagery” (Master Thesis, Texas Technological College, 1965), p. 56.

⁴⁶ David Garrett Izzo, *The Influence of Mysticism on 20th Century British and American Literature*, McFarland & Company Inc. Publishers, London, 1995, p. 98.

⁴⁷ See the gyroscopic movements of two tinctures figure in *AV*, p. 68.

⁴⁸ Stan Smith, *William Butler Yeats: A Critical Introduction*, Macmillan Education Ltd., Hong Kong, 1990, pp. 13, 14.

Although our love is waning, let us stand
 By the lone border of the lake once more,
 Together in that hour of gentleness
 When the poor tired child, passion, falls asleep.
 How far away the stars seem, and how far
 Is our first kiss, and ah, how old my heart!⁴⁹

Over a literary career of almost half a century “Yeats produced an extensive corpus of poems that deal with the quests for knowledge [...] with the themes of death, violence and war. Indeed, the typical Yeats poem is a dramatic lyric in which the poet-quester undertakes an odyssey of the spirit. Yeats was much more than a poet. He was the architect of the Irish Renaissance or⁵⁰ Celtic Revival (1890-1920)⁵¹ and a vital figure in the Abbey Theatre (1904).”⁵²⁵³ Due to these contributions, he is associated with literary reforms in Irish letters yet “transcending Irish issues, and placing Ireland as a literary construct at the centre of the literature of the English-speaking world,”⁵⁴ and “central to the role of folklore in the literary revival”⁵⁵ which is actually a stance against British influence on Ireland “towards the end of the nineteenth century. It is often used as an umbrella term to include the Gaelic revival, referring to an interest in the Irish language; the Celtic revival, referring to all things Celtic, and the literary revival, referring to an interest in creating a literature that would culturally validate a separate Irish identity.”⁵⁶

⁴⁹ *Variorum*, pp. 79, 80.

⁵⁰ “The terms Revival and Renaissance can be interchangeably used.” Robert Fitzroy Foster, *Words Alone: Yeats and his Inheritances*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2011, p. 2.

⁵¹ “A movement [leading by Standish O’Grady, Douglas Hyde, Lady Gregory, George Russel (AE), and W. B. Yeats’s literary efforts of translations Gaelic works into English] against the cultural influences of English rule in Ireland during the Victorian period and sought to promote the spirit of Ireland’s native heritage.” Bc. L. Smidova, IFTL, p. 8.

⁵² Substituted after the first theatrical foundation; the Irish Literary Theatre (1899) and it is considered as the second phase of the Irish Dramatic Movement (1899-1939) which aims at uniting the national literary heritage in Ireland.

⁵³ Brian Arkins, *The Thought of William Butler Yeats*, Peter Lang, Bern, 2010, p. pref.

⁵⁴ Eugene O’Brien, *The Question of Irish Identity in the Writings of W. B. Yeats and James Joyce*, Edwin Mellen Press, London, 1998, p. 123.

⁵⁵ Diarmuid Ó Giolláin, *Locating Irish Folklore Tradition, Modernity, Identity*, Cork University Press, Cork, 2000, p. 104.

⁵⁶ E. O’Brien, *QII*, p. 97.