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Melancholic Patriotism: An Analysis of the Concept of Patriotism through the Works of William Butler Yeats

Capstone

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**Introduction**

The topic that will be addressed in this research paper concerns the matter and concept of patriotism within the confines of Modernist art, more specifically – in the works of William Butler Yeats – a prolific Irish Modernist poet. This topic is important to address because patriotism in Modernism is a neglected topic, there is a lack of scholarly work in this topic. But the topic must be studied because it is a crucial concept in modern society and needs to be understood as part of the art that shapes minds. It has often been argued by some scholars that patriotism is not present in either Modernism in general or even in Yeats’ own work, while some others have opted to simply neglect the topic, deeming it insignificant within the Modernist genre overall, the implication being that patriotism was not a prime topic of interest to most Modernists. However, while this might be true with regards to a few prominent Modernist authors or artists, it certainly does not apply to all of them. Quite a few Modernists – both writers and artists such as Picasso or Virginia Woolf, had patriotic feelings while Yeats is probably among the most notable examples of this.

Perhaps it was the sophistication alongside with rational doubt and duality of his nationalism or the melancholic rather than triumphant spirit behind William Butler Yeats’ patriotism that prevented scholars from seeing the essence of it. After all, patriotism and nationalism have come to be associated with a triumphant spirit – perhaps even proud and joyful spirit. However, most Modernists had a tendency to look at life without rose-colored glasses – some even with awe-inspiring harshness. Hence, it makes sense that the patriotism in their work is also more realistic, less blind and more willing to see and acknowledge flaws or shortcomings, which makes Yeats’ brand of patriotism rather subtle and this might be the reason why it has gone unnoticed by many scholars. But while Modernist patriotism is usually not as romanticized as the patriotic ideals that came before them, it is still very much present and hence needs to be addressed and analyzed.

The literature on this subject is rather lacking, especially in its concreteness – there are very few scholarly articles analyzing the actual poems by even the simplest method of close reading, as to see Yeats’ own work and how his own art correlates to this topic. There are some in-depth articles on the matter; however it is not nearly enough to analyze the depth of Yeats’ patriotism, the development of his nationalistic ideals, and the complexity of his feelings or thoughts with regards to patriotism, his feelings towards his homeland, his thoughts about Irish rebellion, and the evolution of his general stance on the subject.

This study aims to mend these gaps and attempt to utilize the existing literature alongside with Yeats’ actual poems, analyze the latter textually, and draw conclusions from all of the above so that the data can be utilized properly. Yeats’ works about patriotism have a few common themes such as Irish mythology, more contemporary issues that concerned Irish people at the time, and the theme of nostalgia, all of which showcase the development and shifts in Yeats’ patriotism. All these themes will be grouped according to their place in Yeats’ ideological development as to summarize and synthesize the findings in order to showcase the depth and the complexity of the final result - Yeats’ patriotism overall. This, on its turn, can help further the discussion and potentially open the door to the concept of patriotism being a more discussed topic among literary critics of Modernism in general.

**Literature Review**

The literature chosen as primary sources of reference for this study can be classified into two groups – scholarly articles and Yeats’ own poems. Three of the scholarly articles directly deal with Yeats’ own poetry – analyzing the patriotic ideals in Yeats’ poems and commenting on the challenges that Yeats had with his own feelings and thoughts. The three articles in question deal with slightly different themes within Yeats’ patriotic works. The first theme is that of Irish mythos that the poet keeps using in his work. This theme is addressed by Daniel Gomes in his “Reviving Oisin: Yeats and the Conflicted Appeal of Irish Mythology” where he dwells upon Yeats’ poem “The Wanderings of Oisin” and its immense appeal to Irish mythology. Gomes reaches the thought that while Yeats did not keep to the original myth and changed the narrative and lesson of the myth almost entirely it does not really matter; Gomes concludes that the poem still reached its goal because the goal was not to represent the myth in its original version but rather to use the vitriol and the emotion that Oisin’s name in general evokes out of the Irish in order to unify the Irish (2014, pp. 395-396). Gomes’ article is interesting for this research because it helps understand Yeats’ goals when using the Irish myth, especially considering how the myths are often skewed in his work – it gives an opportunity to tap into the meaning behind Yeats’ usage of said myths.

The other distinguishable theme in Yeats’ work is his nationalism which Regan and O’Medley address in their respective works. Regan challenges the conventional view of Yeats as an anti-colonial poet rather than a pro-Irish nationalism poet. Regan writes in his article that “Yeats asserts the vigor of Irish peasantry” in his poems (2006, p. 92) which shows how Yeats’ patriotism went beyond simple anti-colonial sentiment and in fact, Regan shows evidence that Yeats was in fact rather unwilling to be separated from England which renders the anti-colonialist point moot (2006, p. 98): this shows how Yeats was in fact patriotic of Ireland rather than merely anti-colonialist. O’Medley addressed the topic of Yeats’ nationalism by analyzing his “Celtic Twilight” which, O’Medley argues, was Yeats’ way of attempting to do what politics had failed to do – create a unified Ireland (2009, p. 30). This once again shows Yeats’ nationalistic goals and comes to support the concerns of the current research paper. And the last scholarly article chosen is by Parker who directly deals with the subject of patriotism in general, not in the context of art, but as a concept and phenomenon overall – he addresses how there can be two types of patriotism: a blind unassuming one and more of a symbolic patriotism which can be far more useful and rational (2010, p. 110). Parker’s article is crucial in understanding Yeats’ brand of patriotism because it goes to show two types of patriotism – blind and symbolic – which helps to distinguish the specific distinction between the patriotism of the Romantic era, which was more blind, and the patriotism of the Modernist era, which was more symbolic.

The Patriotism of Early Yeats

The earlier type of patriotism that Yeats exhibits can be found in poems such as “To the Rose upon the Rood of Time”, where Yeats actively utilizes Irish mythology to discuss issues broader than patriotism, such as the fleeting nature of time. The work is among the most noted poems by Yeats, due to its sound rhythms and rhymes, however the content of the poem is more crucial. It focuses on ever-lasting subjects, such as mortality, the burden of being, and the passing of time. Here, in this poem, the Irish myths are used primarily as a tool. And while this poem does raise awareness of Irish mythology, it is far from being an advertisement for it. Of course, this does not necessarily mean a lack of patriotism in Yeats’ work, quite the contrary: a poet must love his homeland deeply to know its myths enough to engage them extensively, however, the driving force behind Yeats’ patriotism in this poem is more unchallenged – the poet doesn’t doubt the idea of nationalism, in fact he weaves it into his work extensively without much doubt or challenge, almost using it as the very foundation for the poem.

Daniel Gomes’ article also addresses the same theme from a different angle: Gomes attempts to clarify whether the earlier works of Yeats, primarily his use of Irish myths in his poems, were indeed inspired by patriotism or a mere usage of any material to create a desired narrative. Utilizing Yeats’ own words and an analysis of a long list of literature, Gomes concludes that while the latter is admittedly true to some extent, it can also be argued that Yeats used these myths as a means to “resurrect Irish national resistance” (2014, p. 396) hence this shows the duality of purpose with Yeats’ early usage of Irish national heritage and myths in his poetry.

Later Works: Development of Melancholic Patriotism

In the later period of Yeats’ artistic development, a very complex, unique brand of patriotism emerges – a kind of melancholic patriotism. The emergence of this process will be shown with the help of Regan’s and O’Medley’s work, who both, using the method of textual analysis, pose similar questions with regards to Yeats’ patriotism and nationalism. As a result, Regan concludes that, with his later work, Yeats attempts to forge a new type of national consciousness (2006, p. 98). O’Medley, on his turn, arrives at the thought that in his later years, Yeats drifts from a very unwavering type of nationalism to a more subdued type of patriotism, where more ambiguity is present (2009, p. 29). This idea of ambiguity ties into Parker’s work on the subject of patriotism in general, where the author aims to differentiate between symbolic patriotism and blind patriotism and concludes that blind patriotism differs from the former in that it lacks a value-based form of self-identification, instead it focuses on putting one’s values only on the ethnos (2010, p. 110).

The opposite of this is what can be observed in Yeats’ later works where he begins to put aside the blind patriotism. Instead, a new, doubtful, and melancholic brand of patriotism emerges, that can be demonstrated through Yeats’ own works chosen as primary sources for this research paper, the textual analysis of which will focus on the symbolism and imagery that showcase these shadows of doubt and melancholy. These shadows are especially visible in some of his later poems such as “Easter 1916”, “To Ireland in the Coming Days”, and the “Lake Isle of Innisfree”. The latter poem, the “Lake Isle”, is a testament to a sense of nostalgia – a longing for days that have long passed – a feeling that in Yeats’ own mind, was tightly linked to a geographic location within Ireland – this uninhibited lake. This poem is an example of this melancholic patriotism in Yeats’ work. “To Ireland” is another example where he challenges his previous brand of patriotism, the one he believed in during his youth.

However, the greatest example of what in this research is referred to as Melancholic Patriotism in William Butler Yeats’ work is “Easter 1916”. This poem is the boiling pot of Yeats’ rising doubt in blind patriotism, it is the emergence of a more subtle type of patriotism in his work specifically and perhaps Modernism in general. The poem focuses on the Irish uprising of 1916, where many intellectuals lost their lives while attempting to free Ireland. Yeats demonstrates doubt in his very attitude towards these intellectuals, his not-so flattering opinions on some of them. But where his doubt is especially seen is where he questions whether the sacrifice was necessary at all, but he does not challenge their purpose or dream of freedom for their country. So, the poem shows that Yeats has maintained his love for his country, yet has begun to doubt what exactly should be the cause for Ireland and how loyal to this cause one must be. These poems will be used as primary sources because their analysis is crucial to understanding patriotism through Yeats’ work and thus can overall help understand patriotism in Modernism in general, to a slightly greater degree.

Of course, some of the articles that I have chosen for this project have undeniable biases with regards to the current American political climate and the author’s political affiliations, such as Parker expressing clear antipathy towards conservative values. However, these weaknesses can be factored in while writing a research paper and the bias can be attempted to be corrected. The overall literature on the topic of patriotism in Modernism is in a poor condition – the situation might be described as dire. The current research study will be useful in that there are few direct discussions of any Modernist artist’s patriotic or nationalistic works and very little analysis of it, which is problematic since patriotism is a major theme in modern culture that affects many aspects of life and art. Without the understanding of this theme, the overall body of work of an artist cannot be understood either. And both with regards to Yeats’ patriotism and Modernist artists’ patriotism in general - there is very little scholarly pursuit to analyze the complex patriotic feelings of many Modernist artists, which this study attempts to mend. A possible way to correct for this in the future could be encouragement of exploring the subject more, and a wider recognition of the theme of patriotism being present in Modernism. Of course, this is a type of patriotism different from the previous eras, such as the patriotism of the Romantic era that was rather clear, doubtless, rose-colored, and perhaps even blind. The patriotism of the Modernist era is more doubtful and value-based, which could be the reason why some scholars, who do not recognize the existence of different types of patriotism, may miss it. Hence, the recognition of different types of patriotism and this different type’s presence in Modernism can help further the subject and allow for more extensive literature to come into the fold of discussion.

**Research Question**

This study poses a central research question and two secondary questions that naturally follow from and are directly linked to the first and central question. These two secondary questions have one purpose – to help answer, analyze, and understand the first question. The questions are:

1. What is the role of patriotism and nationalism in the poetic works of William Butler Yeats?
2. How does patriotism influence and inform Yeats’ poetry?
3. How does Yeats’ patriotism change and evolve during his career?

**Timeline**

The timeline for the progression with the study will be as follows:

1. Work with the literature in the first two-three weeks of the semester by finding key quotes and ideas.
2. Outline the research paper by fourth.
3. Start writing by at least the fifth week of the semester.
4. Introduction and Methodology should be finished by the sixth. The remaining time reserved for writing the key portion of the study –the textual analysis of the poems and the articles.

**Methodology**

The method I have chosen to achieve this is the method of content analysis. Articles have been garnered as main sources of research, and four of Yeats’ own poems have been chosen with great detail as primary sources as well. The main poems are – To the Rose upon the Rood of Time, Lake Isle of Innisfree, To Ireland in the Coming Days, and Easter 1916. Of course, more of Yeats’ poems will be discussed in this study, but not quite to the degree as the four chosen works because these four are the most significant in relation to the topic chosen. The reason these works were chosen to be the focus of the project is because they represent some of the most foundational aspects of Yeats’ patriotic thought or thoughts that have any relation to his patriotic principles. These primary sources of information will then be grouped into topics and themes, to make the data easier to analyze. There will also be external scholarly articles referenced, not as primary scholarly sources, but more as secondary, to help with the textual analysis and close-reading of the actual poems.

First, the primary sources – the four scholarly articles - will be analyzed; the ideas presented in them will be checked for biases and compared to the actual works of Yeats that the authors of the articles discuss – to see whether their conclusions are justified. The ideas presented in some of these scholarly articles will then be compared and contrasted to external works to see if these conclusions reached by the four primary scholarly sources hold up in the face of ideas presented by people of opposing views, if any such opposing articles exist, considering the lack of literature on this subject. Then, these articles will be synthesized to reach a cohesive conclusion in terms of a scholarly opinion on the topic that this study discusses – the type of patriotism in Yeats’ work.

The synthesis of the scholarly articles will be achieved by grouping them into themes and then uniting those themes under a larger motif. O’Medley’s “Belief and Unbelief: Nationalist Doubt in W. B. Yeats's "The Celtic Twilight"” and Regan’s “W.B. Yeats: Irish Nationalism and Post-Colonial Theory” can be easily grouped into a single theme – the theme of Irish nationalism present in William Butler Yeats’ work, since both of these scholars directly discuss and analyze that very topic throughout their articles.

However, Parker’s “Symbolic versus Blind Patriotism: Distinction without Difference?” can also be paired with O’Medley’s article into a seperate sub-group of themes, since they both address the issue of doubt in patriotism – albeit in different contexts. Parker discusses patriotism in general and as a phenomenon – the two different kinds of patriotism that can occur being blind patriotism or symbolic patriotism, which can encompass a more nuanced and a more doubtful, realistic type of patriotism. O’Medley, on the other hand, talks about patriotism in Yeats’ own poetic work rather than patriotism as an abstract concept. And O’Medley also incorporates the theme of nationalistic doubt into his discussion, which Parker addresses at length on an abstract, philosophical level.

The final scholarly work, “Reviving Oisin: Yeats and the Conflicted Appeal of Irish Mythology” by Gomes can also be grouped into a sub-group of themes alongside with O’Medley’s work. Gomes’ work addresses the issue of Irish myths that Yeats used in his poetry – the how and whys of the matter are discussed at length in Gomes’ work. O’Medley, although to a slightly lesser extent, also touches on the subject by discussing the Irish myths in Yeats’ work and the impact those had on Yeats’ nationalism.

Next, a case study approach will be implemented in regards to the four poems. Each will be analyzed through close-reading, checks for metaphors, allusions, and other literary tools. During the process of content analysis external secondary sources or reference points may be used to help solidify the conclusions or check their correctness. Next, the content of the poems, whether directly stated by Yeats or inferred from the poems through the method of textual analysis, will be synthesized to showcase the unique brand of patriotism that Yeats created – Yeats’ melancholic patriotism, all this will be achieved by combining the synthesis of the scholarly articles and the content analysis of Yeats’ poems.

The synthesis of the poetic works and scholarly sources can be achieved by categorizing the poems as well: “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” and “Easter 1916” are two poems of Yeats’ that showcase the melancholy in his patriotism the most. The first poem achieves it by showing a deep-seated yearning for a childhood spent in Ireland and a general sense of longing and nostalgia for Ireland, while the second poem, focused around the 1916 Irish rebellion shows Yeats’ doubt and his hesitation to follow a blind idealized version of patriotism, which is similar to what Yeats shows in the poem “To Ireland in the Coming Days”. The poem “To the Rose Upon the Rood of Time”, on the other hand, touches on the matter of Irish myths and Yeats’ usage of them in his poetic work, which can help understand the motivation and the way in which Yeats used the Irish myths.

**Analysis**

**Yeats, the Irish Myth, and Melancholic Patriotism**

William Butler Yeats had a habit of appealing to Irish myth rather frequently in his work. Sometimes, the appeal could have a clear, distinct patriotic motive behind it. But some of his most prolific works that appeal to Irish mythos are more than a matter of national identity. They involve that too, but they also tend to go a bit further in meaning as well. In his poem “To the Rose upon the Rood of Time” (1893) Yeats appeals to elements of Irish myth in order to help make a number of indirect, veiled points. In fact, this poem is perhaps among the most patriotic works of Yeats, even though it may not appear to be so at first glance.

The main symbol utilized in the poem is the ephemeral rose, which in this work can be seen as a symbol of Ireland itself. In fact, the rose has often been an important symbol in the Irish myths overall, and was even seen by many Irish poets, Yeats included, as the potential national flower (Billigheimer, 2002, p. 277). So, many Irish poets of the era and Yeats himself, at least earlier in his career when he wrote “To the Rose…”, had an intention of positioning the rose as a symbol of Ireland. In this context, it makes sense for one of his earlier poems to reflect this intention so directly. The poem alludes to Irish mythic figures and cultural monuments. By using these allusions, Yeats creates an image of Ireland as the Rose making the Rose the symbol of Ireland. These allusions also help Yeats create a link between ancient Ireland and the eternal beauty of nature.

Moreover, this idea finds further root in the fact that the poem itself is riddled with Irish mythic elements. Yeats goes out of his way in order to utilize as many Irish mythic elements as possible, such as, druids or Irish mythic heroic characters like Cuchulain and Fergus (Yeats, 1989). Those are all images very tightly associated with the ancient Celtic culture. In fact, the druids are not only tightly associated with the Irish mythos, but also were the archetypical image of the old wise man, only the quintessentially Celtic and Irish version. Hence, mentioning the druid, and specifying that he is “grey, wood-nurtured, quiet-eyed” is only adding to the quintessentially Irish mythos of the poem. The druid is always portrayed as an incredibly wise magician-sort of archetype, and so he is ‘grey’ with wisdom and worry, he is ‘quiet-eyed’ due to a sense of sorrow that said wisdom brings him, and he is ‘wood-nurtured’ because, just as the early Celts were, he is close to nature and its spirit.

Another archetypically Irish figure mentioned in the poem is Cuchulain, and he is particularly mentioned to be “battling with the bitter tide”. Cuchulain is an Irish mythical hero that appears to be the reincarnation of the Irish deity Lugh – the warrior-god, the king and the savior (Ward, 2011, p. 13). So, Cuchulain is an archetypal figure in the Irish myth, especially with respect to the idea of a savior, which Ireland definitely needed when Yeats wrote “To the Rose upon the Rood of Time”. It was an incredibly trying time for the Irish people, and a figure associated with the savior archetype definitely was intentionally put into the poem by Yeats. This is especially highlighted in that the savior-figure Cuchulain is explicitly said to be ‘battling with the bitter tide’. So, the quintessential savior of the Irish mythos is carrying out his heroic task no matter the bitter power of his enemy.

Furthermore, the poem also contains the line “I would, before my time to go,/ Sing of old Eire and the ancient ways” where Eire is the old name for Ireland. The line is then immediately followed by mentions of the red rose, which cements Ireland as the metaphorical red rose. In essence, this poem is an ode to Ireland, to the ancient ways of the Irish people, to the beauty of Ireland and her myths. And taking into account the fact that Yeats and many of his contemporary Irish poets had an intention to make the rose into the national Irish flower, it can be doubtlessly concluded that this poem is a patriotic ode to Ireland. All of this shows how “To the Rose” is a veiled yet strongly patriotic poem.

However, there is something else besides patriotism in this poem. The poem “To the Rose upon the Rood of Time” has a rather unusual tone compared to many other songs of patriotic love. It has an overwhelming sense of sadness, a sense of loss embedded in it. This feeling of loss is exemplified through phrases such as “Cuchulain battling with the bitter tide” or “Sing in their high and lonely melody”. The wordings like “bitter tide” or “lonely melody” could not have been chosen randomly by the great poet, which means Yeats intended to weave a certain feeling of sadness, a certain sense of melancholia into this poem.

In fact, both of these lines carry a sense of bitterness or loneliness in them which can be seen as part of a bitter, melancholic sense of love for Ireland. Furthermore, the next lines from the same poem exemplify this melancholic patriotism even further: “…no more blinded by man's fate,/ I find under the boughs of love and hate,/ In all poor foolish things that live a day,/ Eternal beauty wandering on her way”. These lines demonstrate a budding doubt in Yeats’ patriotism, where the words of being no longer blinded by man’s fate symbolize the very first seed of doubt. The author speaks of opening his eyes, being no longer blinded, and hence being able to find eternal beauty wandering around under the boughs of love and hate. This can be interpreted as a message of peace amidst blindness and hate – a message of shy hope. This is what sets Yeats’ patriotism aside from more Romantic poets, with whom such lines would carry less doubt in their own country. Unlike the Romantic poets, Yeats allows a seed of doubt to seep into his words and gives his reader a chance to feel that seed creeping into the poem.

A close inspection of another poem by Yeats that tackles the same theme of Irish myth paints somewhat of a similar picture. In “Reviving Oisin: Yeats and the Conflicted Appeal of Irish Mythology” Daniel Gomes analyzes Yeats’ appeal to Irish myth in the poem “The Wanderings of Oisin”. Gomes says that “along with casting Oisin as a sign of Celtic distinctiveness upon which a distinctly Irish nation could be reclaimed, Yeats also casts Oisin as a vehicle to a primordial imaginary underlying all myth, religion, and ritual” (Gomes, 2014, p. 392). So, in this poem Yeats demonstrates a desire for Ireland to blossom as well, which is a rather patriotic intention. However, as Gomes goes on to explain, Yeats’ designs go further than that; he also contemplates the Irish myth, here personified through Oisin’s character, as a source of understanding the primordial archetypes that underlie all myths and religions. This, of course, is not a show of patriotic doubt or melancholy. But this is yet again a case of Yeats using Irish myth in his works to express both concern or love for Ireland and highlight some bigger, grander point. This further shows Yeats’ ability to simultaneously love his homeland and express the emotion0 through his poetry, but also see beyond the idealistic Romanticized patriotic impulse and comprehend the bigger picture, which in poems like “To the Rose” can turn into melancholy.

Another poem of Yeats that is again relying heavily on Irish mythos to carry the poem is “The Stolen Child”. The poem takes inspiration from the ancient Celtic tales of faeries that stole children. But in this poem, there is a twist to the old tale in the sense that the faeries are justifying their action. They are essentially beguiling the human child to come away with them, like telling him of reddest cherries that they’ve hidden away and generally attempting to create a seductive image in the child’s eyes which would make him join them.

But at the end of each stanza, after calling upon the child to come away with them, the faeries say “For the world’s more full of weeping than you can understand”, which is quite in line with the idea of a general sense melancholy in Yeats’ work as a whole. Here, Yeats is displaying the depth of the tragedy of being through the words’ of the faeries. Once again, he is using the Irish myth and the Irish folklore as a baseline of operation, as a narrative tool in order to make a grander bigger point about the pain that is unavoidably linked to existence. And of course, the point itself is filled to the brim with melancholic sentiments which also seep into all ideals of Yeats, as it will be later demonstrated, patriotism as well.

**Nostalgia as a Display of Melancholic Patriotism**

The poem “Lake Isle of Innisfree” (1890) is an ode to Yeats’ home – the little island of Innisfree which is the place where he grew up. It is about this small isle that he spent his childhood at and so it is riddled with nostalgia. The poem was written while he was still in London, as Yeats himself admitted, he felt quite homesick when he was inspired to write it. It is, in a sense, a fantasy. It’s a leap of imagination with a dash of escapism, where the poet fantasizes about abandoning his worries and going back to his childhood, a place of nostalgic happiness and joy. Yeats mentions building a ‘small cabin’ there, a sort of mental safe haven for him.

The cabin in question is actually described by the poet as having been built with “clay and wattles”. These are materials that had been used to build cabins in the distant past which invokes nostalgic feelings very vividly. It is also, in a sense, a link to nature, a way of building more in tuned with nature. In fact, nature as a theme comes up regularly in this poem. The poem is filled to the brim with allegories and vivid descriptions of nature. “Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings” is how Yeats describes mornings at the isle – so peaceful and in-synch with nature are these descriptions that the reader can almost hear the singing of the crickets that rise as the veil of morning drops. “…live alone in the bee-loud glade. And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow”, says Yeats. These lines indicate a desire on the poet’s part to be left alone with his own mind, nature, and the peace that nature could bring him; these lines show how much of an escapist poem this truly is. It is a fantasy of finding a deep, primordial sort of peace that seems inherent in nature, perhaps even a sense of safety and protection that mother nature can offer to all human beings.

Furthermore, what can be said about the materials that he would supposedly build the cabin with is that, in a way, they are a juxtaposition to the lines that come at the end of the poem: “While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,/ I hear it in the deep heart’s core”. These last lines, especially the reference to grey pavements is a metaphor for the urbanized city of London Yeats was at the time he wrote the poem while he was dreaming of this nature-filled haven of peace. In fact, Yeats presents modernity not only as grey but as something to escape from, something which can give one stress and anxiety while the isle is a safe paradise, So, in this poem, urbanized modernity is presented as a grey pavement while the older ways are presented as more in synch with nature and hence the peacefulness and the sense of safety that nature has to offer.

Moreover, the poem begins with the line “I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree” which has a quite decisive ring to it, but then the poem ends with Yeats saying “While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,/ I hear it in the deep heart’s core” which, on the other hand indicates that Yeats has not actually risen and gone to Innisfree. He says he can hear those sounds of nature in the depths of his heart’s core, yet does not attempt to actually go there and hear the sounds himself. This, in a way, demonstrates how the poem is a fantasy; it’s a retreat into one’s inner world that in this case and (generally pretty commonly) takes the shape of Yeats’ childhood home and memories, it’s a dreamy longing for some hidden emotion, the emotion being Yeats’ desire for peace of mind and soul, the sense of safety that these nostalgic memories of a safe haven can offer. Thus it is quite telling that he chose the location that houses his childhood memories to tell this story of a man who longs for peace and comfort.

He also describes the serene nature of the isle with phrases such as ‘where the cricket sings’, ‘there midnight’s all a glimmer, and noon a purple show’, or ‘evening full of the linnet’s wings’. These all exemplify the serene and calm atmosphere of the isle. As Yeats himself puts it about Innisfree, he “shall have some peace there”. So, he himself explicitly states that the isle is a place that he thinks would bring him peace. Some of the particularly haunting yet beautiful phrases like “noon a purple show” or “midnight’s all a glimmer” are especially peculiar. Purple is hardly the first color people think of when they see or think about the noon, yet in some peculiar moments one can catch purple hues in the evening hours; and midnight does not have many glimmers of light while the noon certainly does. So, in a way, Yeats has flipped the phrasing upside down, attributing the features of noon to midnight and of midnight to noon. The goal of doing this could have been to make the reader pay attention, or perhaps highlight the peculiarity of the place he’s describing – the peacefulness, the rarity of such peace and safety, and the almost unrealistic fantasy-esque essence of this place.

Another famous poem describing nature in a similar sort of way is Wordsworth’s “I wandered lonely as a cloud” but the main difference between the two works is that Wordsworth is far more Romantic in his approach, as his era would dictate. His comparisons, metaphors, and allusions are very Romantic in essence. For example, he anthropomorphized the daffodils when he calls a bunch of them “a crowd of daffodils”. Yeats’ description, while just as tender and loving in nature is somewhat more distant, it’s less direct, and hence more passive and perhaps even aloof. In Yeats’ work, nature is a sort of higher being that can help reach peace and give protection or safety, while in Wordsworth’s poem, nature is a friend who almost directly speaks to the author. Yeats longs more for comfort, safety, and peace from nature rather than friendship. This is why he appeals to a childhood memory, because childhood is generally a safer and more peaceful time with more careless memories of a time not filled with so much worries and dangers.

This sense of a desire for peace finds its way through Yeats’ longing for his hometown which expresses itself as nostalgia in this poem. And though the poem is not explicitly, consciously patriotic, it does have elements of yearning for a home. Home in general is an important theme in Yeats’ work, and in this poem it manifests itself as the isle of his childhood, the small isle in Ireland. The poem demonstrates how Yeats’ love of Ireland and his childhood isle manifest themselves through a sense of yearning the dearly missed isle holds for him, and the significance it carries by turning into a melancholic type of nostalgia.

In essence, it’s an idealized fantasy. This isle of Innisfree is Yeats’ own version of an ideal haven to escape to – it’s him projecting a perfect peaceful nature onto the Irish isle and putting it up against modernity. This also demonstrates how modernity is displayed as a furthering from his (or everyone else’s) original roots, which he desperately wants to return to. Innisfree is the eternally peaceful part of Ireland, or it is that, at least in Yeats’ mind, his own imagination. Innisfree is peaceful and calm and safe, while the rest of Ireland is constantly at war and in pain. So, in a sense, this is Yeats expressing through his nostalgia a desire for peace and safety both for himself and for Ireland.

Another poem by Yeats that has the same tones and themes riddled all over it is “The Wild Swans at Coole”. The work is essentially Yeats’ nostalgia for the older days as he grows old himself. Coole is, again, a spot for his childhood, which again raises the theme of nostalgia. The poem is dedicated to the days that Yeats spent at Augusta Gregory’s residence at Coole Park, counting the swans, as he puts it: “The nineteenth autumn has come upon me/ Since I first made my count” showing how long has he been counting the swans at the lake, and how he must find something very pleasing about this count to keep doing it over and over again throughout all those years.

The general tone, just as in the previous poem, is linked to the idea of peace-giving nature. In fact, Yeats states repeatedly how while he himself has aged, the swans have not. He says, “All's changed since I, hearing at twilight,/ The first time on this shore” meaning not only his own personal troubles and pains in life, love, loss, or age, but also the political and military state of the world in the aftermath of WWI, and all the mental, emotional, psychological, and economical, repercussions the war had on everyone. But then he goes on to say, “Unwearied still, lover by lover,/ They paddle in the cold”, where ‘they’ refers to the swans themselves. So, in this context, Yeats portrays the birds as something constant, something that will last far longer than he. This is peculiar since birds do not live long, but here Yeats does not mean the swans individually are unchanged or unwearied, but the swans at Coole lake as a whole have not changed.

The swans are still full of life, nature, and vitality. He links them to nature same way he links the isle of Innisfree to nature – as these objects that represent some grand powerful force of nature. It is especially notable that the poem was written in the aftermath of the World War and many critics have linked the nostalgia in the “Wild Swans”, as well him once again going back to his roots (the place named Coole), to an underlying patriotic Irish theme. But what is most important about this poem is that, just as in the “Lake Isle”, here too Yeats links the concepts of peace-giving nature to a foundational place for himself, a place of nostalgia and a place rooted in his homeland. This, once again, links the concepts of peace, home, nature, and life to his roots which in both cases go back to Ireland due to them being located in the country.

**Nationalistic Doubt as a Form of Melancholic Patriotism**

While Yeats’ earlier years, without a doubt, had been patriotic, towards the end of his life, his patriotism had begun to change. His patriotism, although it already did have some melancholic longing in it, was still heavily influenced by the Romanticists of the past. But as seen through the previous section regarding the theme of nostalgia in Yeats’ poetry, towards the end of his life, his views had begun to change. After having seen a World War, his patriotic ideas became even more nuanced. He became more thoughtful in his patriotism and less impulsive, one could argue. This is especially visible in his poems “To Ireland in the Coming Times” (1913) and “Easter 1916” (1916). Both of these are among his later works, both of which show how much his feelings for Ireland had grown and changed.

“To Ireland” is essentially an appeal to the country itself, where he is mostly apologizing for having failed his homeland earlier in his life, or what perceived at the time as having failed it. He claims that time is short, and so he must try to be remembered with men like Ferguson, who fought for Irish independence. However, in “Easter 1916”, which was not written that much later than “To Ireland”, a bit more of that quintessentially Yeats-esque Melancholic Patriotism comes through.

A striking example of this is the repeated lines of “Because the red-rose-bordered hem” and each time Yeats repeats these lines he speaks of Ireland. And, as was already established in the first section of this Analysis, Yeats had often used the rose as a symbol of Ireland. This goes back to Yeats portraying Ireland as a beautiful rose caught up in tragedy. However, what’s particular about this poem is that, being an aging man himself by the time he wrote the poem, Yeats comes around the topic of time quite frequently in “To Ireland”.

This can be seen through lines such as “When Time began to rant and rage/ The measure of her flying feet/ Made Ireland's heart begin to beat”. Here, Yeats is making Ireland to be this fantasy-like land that exists out of time itself, which seems to be what makes it so special in his eyes – a land that is out of the reach of time and so out of the threat of decay as a consequence of time. Perhaps, this is the reason that Yeats so often portrayed Ireland as the dream-land to which he could escape. He also touches upon the topic of time in the lines “From our birthday, until we die,/ Is but the winking of an eye” which seem to represent the insignificance of a single human life in the grand scheme of things. With these lines, Yeats attempts to show how this dream-like land is so grand and out of human reach that in its eyes, an entire human life is but a wink of an eye. This gives the reader a profound yet melancholic sensation – a feeling of being part of something great and yet being far away from this greatness.

The next poem, “Easter 1916” is mostly about the events of that very same date that the work is titled after, when a number of revolutionaries who demanded Irish freedom and independence died. Among them were a few people whom Yeats knew personally, and these events spoke to him on some level. He did not know them very well, even went as far as to openly admit in the poem that he did not think very highly of them (by admitting that he would mock some of these people). Among them, was also a man who had caused suffering to Yeats’ beloved woman and her daughter, and yet he mentions that man as well, since this poem is about a larger narrative in Yeats’ eyes. So he wrote a poem about these people, their dream of Irish independence, and their deaths. The poem is rather strange: it does not depict those who died as definite heroes. In fact, among them was a man Yeats disliked thoroughly yet Yeats sang him in the poem too: as Yeats himself says “Yet I number him in the song;/ He, too, has resigned his part/ In the casual comedy;/ He, too, has been changed in his turn,/ Transformed utterly”. The implication, of course, is that even though this was not a good man by Yeats’ own esteem, he nonetheless believed in the same ideals and he too has died in the name of these ideals.

Yeats seems to be demonstrating a general sense of knowledge of these people, yet he does not claim to have known very well. He says, “I have met at close of day… I have passed with a nod of the head/ Or polite meaningless words” implying that he only knew them briefly, superficially, so much so that he passed them with a mere nod of the head or by saying polite yet indifferent and meaningless words. He goes on to say “And thought before I had done/ Of a mocking tale or a gibe/ To please a companion/ Around the fire at the club” where he goes a step further and actually suggests that he might have even thought of mocking remarks about these people, so implying that perhaps he did not even like them on a personal level. Yet he writes a poem about them because of their actions as if he feels he must honor that.

Moreover, the stanza ends with a sentence that Yeats will be coming back to again and again all throughout the poem: “A terrible beauty is born”. This line, as if in honor and sorrow of what has transpired, signifies Yeats’ attitude towards the events of 1916, the people involved, and their action – beautiful perhaps in their bravery or love for Ireland and yet terrible in terms of the consequences. This sense of admiration Yeats holds for these people and their love for Ireland is riddled all throughout the poem. A whole large stanza is devoted to this respect, where he glorifies their ideals and sacrifice with an old Romanticist style. He uses metaphors, allegories and allusions to discuss their sacrifice, talking with a beautiful poetic language. The poet says that those people’s hearts were united with one purpose of Irish freedom and “enchanted to a stone”, likens their efforts to efforts “to trouble the living stream”. The stream in question is probably the flow of history itself – of time and space. He ends the stanza with the words “The stone’s in the midst of all” as if simultaneously showing the futility of their efforts and yet still praising their dedication and bravery. This whole stanza is, essentially, a large pastoral metaphor. The Irishmen he sings have seemingly hardened their hearts against those they consider to have wronged them, and have focused on “one purpose”— rebellion. He then compares the hearts of those men to a stone that “troubles” the living stream of history.

Another way Yeats’ nationalistic doubt shows in this poem is through him questioning whether it was all worth it to begin with. Note that England had implied that freedom would, in fact, be given to Ireland prior to these events. And considering this, Yeats questions: “Was it needless death after all?/ For England may keep faith/ For all that is done and said”. The essential point being that England may still keep its promise and if that were to happen, those deaths would have been rendered needless. So, even though Yeats had become rather serious about his attitude towards Ireland and patriotism in general, he had also become more doubtful in these matters, which can be linked to a sense of melancholic sort of sadness for these lost lives, losses that might have even turned out needless to begin with.

Moreover, many literary critics would support this analysis of Yeats’ patriotism. His was a layered and complex type of nationalism as can be seen from the words of Seamus O’Medley who says that Yeats’ nationalistic sentiments were “uncertain” (2009). There was vagueness about it, perhaps an unwillingness of radicalization. Another critic named Stephen Regan says (2006), “The nationalism that Yeats espoused should not be confused with revolutionary separatism” and implies that Yeats had a more slow-working approach to any nationalistic goals that he might have hoped for Ireland. All of this leads to a single conclusion – Yeats’ sadness and genuine shock at the events that occurred on Easter 1916 exemplifies his unwillingness for radical measures through his melancholy over the loss of talent that Ireland suffered as result of radical thought and ideology.

This can be further demonstrated through a comparison of Yeats’ patriotism to Pearse’s type of patriotism, who was one of the four figures Yeats mentions in Easter 1916 and was a poet himself. As Parker says, patriotism comes in two forms – blind patriotism and symbolic patriotism: the former is the type that is based in ethnos alone and has no ideas behind it while the latter is the sort of patriotism that is founded upon specific ideals that a person might hold and project onto their homeland (2010, p. 110). Pearse’s patriotism is more akin to the former type of patriotism, as can be seen through numerous works of his. A particular one that shows the stark difference is one called “I am Ireland”.

The poem is a very short but powerful, pathos-ridden ode to Ireland. Pearse implies that Ireland is the old wise mother who is great and glorious but has been let down by her children who do not defend her. This can be seen through lines such as “Great my glory”, which shows Pearse’s view of Ireland as a glorious ideal, and “Great my shame:/ My own children that sold their mother”, which shows Pearse’s opinion of Irishmen who were reluctant to free Ireland from the English rule – he saw them as children who sold out their motherland. Saw, the poem is not very subdued or calm in its general spirit. And despite being just a few lines long, it still showcases Pearse’s more radical type of patriotism – blind patriotism. In this poem, Pearse praises Ireland and demonstrates its glory all the while asserting rather strict ideals of patriotism. This could also explain how Pearse ended up caught in a rebellion that took his life – due to a blind sort of patriotism that was unwilling to compromise.

Yeats, on the other hand, was more careful and cautious not only with his words but even with his thoughts. This is especially well-seen in his poem “Easter 1916”. While it is, essentially, an ode to the people who had passed away, it was still somewhat doubtful, as if uncertain if their deaths were wise or necessary. There is that constant presence of melancholy in this poem that so prevails many of Yeats’ patriotic works. And this combination of caution and melancholy yet an undeniable gentle love for Ireland make Yeats’ patriotism sound like the type of patriotism that Parker calls symbolic: the type of nationalism that goes deeper and attempts to be more thoughtful and more careful with human lives and suffering.

**Conclusion**

As was shown through close reading and analysis, the role of patriotism and nationalism in the works of Yeats is vast and complex. In his earlier days, patriotism informed Yeats’ works in a slightly more superficial way. His way of incorporating his homeland into his works was mainly through the Irish myths and tales. Poems such as “To the Rose upon the Rood of Time” or “Oisin” show this level of interest he had in the topic. He kept incorporating Irish stories into his works, all the while making grander points about life, reality, or existence. So, while the theme of patriotism was definitely of interest to him, as was seen through his own words and letters, it was nonetheless rather superficial and far from being the main focus of meticulous pondering for him.

However, as Yeats grew older, his attitude towards the topic began to shift. Among the biggest reasons for this shift can be found in his own personal issues and fears, such as aging. As Yeats became older, he became even more prone to melancholy and began to dislike the bustle of big cities. And, as seen through poems such as “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” or “The Wild Swans at Coole”, many nostalgic sentiments, associations with the better careless of youth began to surface in his works. These themes were often linked to the idea of nature being a peace-giving, protective force and Ireland is often associated with this force. This is when Yeats’ nostalgic melancholic patriotism surfaces at full power for the first time. Even though most of his previous works had been rather sad, they hadn’t yet acquired the edge that separates his later period. The previous era of his work was more Romantic in nature, while the later one is more Modernistic in its essence. However, the full power of Yeats’ melancholic patriotism blooms at the latest period of his life and work, after the World War, where he has come to see the death that can come with ideals, as seen through “To Ireland” and “Easter 1916”. At this stage, Yeats can clearly separate a rose-colored vision of patriotism from a more realistic version. He has become disillusioned with the idealism that drove his earlier works and the work of poets like Pearse – his patriotism has become thoughtful, careful, and cautious. His love for his home is still present, it is simply uncertain of the value of idealism against the immediate value of human life.

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