

國立臺灣大學外國語文學系(所)

碩士論文

Graduate Institute of Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures

College of Liberal Arts

National Taiwan University

Master Thesis

茵尼斯菲至拜占庭：葉慈之尋魂之旅

Innisfree to Byzantium: Yeats's Spiritual Journey



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中華民國九十七年六月

June, 2008

國立臺灣大學碩士學位論文
口試委員會審定書

茵尼斯菲至拜占庭：葉慈之尋魂之旅
Innisfree to Byzantium: Yeats's Spiritual Journey

本論文係莊孟樵君 (R9212213) 在國立臺灣大學外國語文學系、所完成之碩士學位論文，於民國九十七年六月十九日承下列考試委員審查通過及口試及格，特此證明



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Acknowledgement

I want to thank my supervisor, Dr. Ya-Feng Wu, and my family, without whom this book probably would not be finished; and I want to thank the great tradition, without which this book probably would not be needed.



Absrtact

Inspired by R. K. R. Thornton's essay, "How Far is it from Innisfree to Byzantium?," this thesis intends to supplement what Thornton has overlooked in his paper by including a more detailed comparison between the two imaginary locales and the difference or / and the similarity between the early Yeats and the late Yeats.

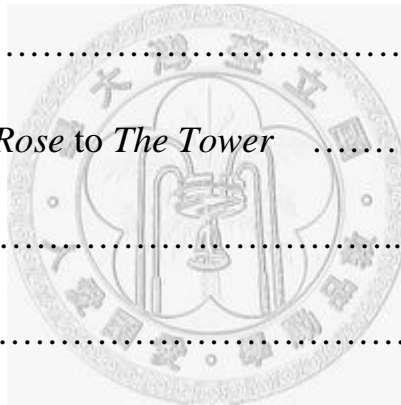
By closely comparing poems from *The Rose* and *The Tower*, this thesis argues that the distance between Innisfree and Byzantium is "no distance at all" as Thornton maintains, that Yeats's change of style is intentional rather than coincidental. Yeats's change of style, therefore, is his sleight of hand, a way of presenting his multi-faceted self with imagined gestures and poses. And even though Yeats seems to have found the solution for haunting sensual music, the problem of death is actually insolvable.

To sum up, Yeats had been fumbling upon the similar themes within different language and styles. Even if he touched upon many different issues along his literary career, the issue of the soul had always been what he concerned most.

Keywords: Yeats, Innisfree, Byzantium, *The Rose*, *The Tower*

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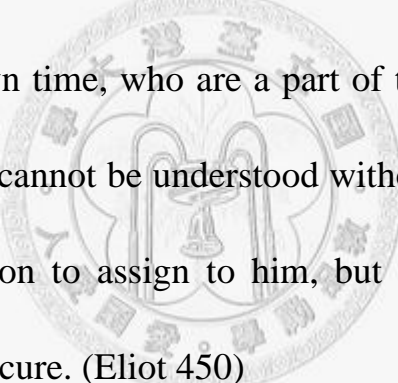
Introduction

It is said that geniuses often come to realize their brilliance in early ages, and Yeats is no exception. In a letter to an early friend of his, Mary Cronan, Yeats included a poem and said, “my peculiarities [sic] [. . .] will never be done justice to until they have become classics and are set for examinations.” (qtd. in Finneran 1) If what Yeats meant were fame and poetic achievement, his peculiarities indeed have already received what they deserve. Yeats’s poetry, however, did not lead him to the hall of fame until 1921 with the publication of *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* and its well-known hit “The Second Coming.” Two years later, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature and his stature was finally confirmed. Yet Yeats’s poetry never evolved into a greater form as they are now were it not for his marriage with George Hyde Lees in 1917, which cast anchor for his homeless affection, set free his unsatisfied love, and unlocked his dormant talent.

After winning the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1923, Yeats was

expected to enjoy a retirement as he expressed in his “The Lake Isle of Innisfree.” Yet he did not take the rest, and he soon went to work on “Sailing to Byzantium.” *The Tower* (1928) and *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1933), these two collections of poems, are widely considered to be his greatest achievement. T. S. Eliot praised Yeats as

the greatest poet of our time – certainly the greatest in this language, and so far as I am able to judge, in any language [. . .] [and] was one of those few whose history is the history of their own time, who are a part of the consciousness of an age which cannot be understood without them. This is a very high position to assign to him, but I believe that it is one which is secure. (Eliot 450)



Whether Yeats is the best poet as Eliot claims, Yeats’s achievement in poetry is indisputable. His poetry travels through several decades, inspiring critics and writers alike.

According to Finneran’s insightful summary, the Yeats scholarship, which he also dubbed as the “Yeats industry,” had begun since 1887, when one of Yeats’s friends Katharine Tynan published a commentary on Yeats, saying that he would “take high place among the world’s future

singers.” (qtd. in Finneran 1) Criticisms on Yeats have consistently grown since then. Since 1971, there were over 6000 items, excluding those in other languages; and there were not “any signs of a decline in scholarly output.” Consequently, the following survey of Yeats scholarship can only be selective.

Yeats was lucky in his career, having published a collection of poems and a poetic drama before he was twenty-five; and two years later he published a novelette and short story — *Mosada* (1886), *The Wandering of Oisín and Other Poems* (1889), and *John Sherman and Dhoya* (1891). Studies on Yeats seemed to grow slowly but steadily. His works, like those of other great writers’, roused both praise and contempt. Forrest Reid in his *W. B. Yeats: A Critical Study* (1915) suggested that Yeats’s power was declining, which meant he probably had reached his culmination. This statement would soon be disproved in less than a decade when Yeats showcased his amazing capability in creating new and great poetry.

After Yeats’s death in 1939, the same year when James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* saw the daylight, more and more studies on Yeats appeared, mostly in the field of biographical criticism. Joseph Hone,

who virtually enjoyed unlimited access to Yeats's manuscripts, launched *W. B. Yeats: 1865-1939* (1943) that was considered "most factual of all the studies of the poet's life" until the publication of R. F. Foster's two huge volumes (1949) document the poet's "accidents and incoherence" in life, counting Yeats more as a doer than a poet (Faherty 15). A. N. Jeffares's second biography on Yeats, *W. B. Yeats, A New Biography* (1988), advancing on his first attempt in 1949, is another book rich in quotations, paraphrases, and pictures, but it seems to refuse to make any summary or analysis as Richard Ellmann did in his *Yeats: The Man and the Mask* (1948), which divides Yeats's life into several phases, roughly chronologically, and demonstrates great interest in Yeats's constantly-felt sense of division and his lifelong pursuit for unity. Ellmann published another book of Yeats, *The Identity of Yeats* (1954), putting more emphasis on the development of the poet's themes and styles, to finish his commentary of Yeats's art that he had difficulty elaborating in the biography. Alasdair D. F. Macrae, in his *W. B. Yeats: A Literary Life* (1995), focuses on the influence Yeats's predecessors had on him and his influence on the coming poets. Terence Brown's *The Life of W. B. Yeats: A Critical Biography* (1999) draws the reader's attention to Yeats's

obsession for the occult. However, he does not comment on or explicate Yeats's style and techniques overtly like Ellmann does.

Northrop Frye's "Yeats and the Language of Symbolism" (1947) was seminal in pointing out Yeats's debt to Romanticism. It inspired many subsequent criticisms on the similar base such as Hazard Adams's *Blake and Yeats: the Contrary Vision* (1955), Harold Bloom's *Yeats* (1970), and George Bornstein's *Yeats and Shelley* (1970). Graham Hough, on the other hand, showed interest in the late-nineteenth-century influences on Yeats and compared him with Victorian writers like John Ruskin, Walter Pater, or William Morris in his *The Last Romantics* (1949). This attitude was then inherited by Frank Kermode in *Romantic Image* (1957) and Ian Fletcher in *W. B. Yeats and His Contemporaries* (1987). As Yeats later swayed from Romanticism to Modernism, Bloom and Bornstein both articulated for the change. Bloom in *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973) indicated Yeats's creative attempts at casting off Romanticism, and Bornstein, in *Transformation of Romanticism in Yeats, Eliot, and Stevens* (1976), put Yeats between Romanticism and Modernism.

Many other issues had emerged other than Yeats's Romantic

inheritance. For examples, T. R. Henn focused on Yeats's Irish background in *The Lonely Tower: Studies in the Poetry of W. B. Yeats* (1950), Thomas Parkinson discussed Yeats's style and the connection of it to his poetry in *W. B. Yeats, Self-Critic: A Study of His Early Verse* (1951), and Vivienne Koch applied a New Critical approach in *W. B. Yeats: The Tragic Phase* (1951). In 1960s, the highpoint of Yeats study, Jon Stallworthy and Curtis Bradford continued Parkinson's examination of Yeats's manuscript material in *W. B. Yeats: The Later Poetry* (1964) and explored the textual history of Yeats's work. Helen Vendler's *Yeats's Vision and the Later Plays* (1963) considers the relationship between Yeats's system and his drama. Edward Engelburg's *The Vast Design: Patterns in W. B. Yeats's Aesthetic* (1964) traces the development of Yeats's theory of art. Thomas R. Whitaker's *Swan and Shadow: Yeats's Dialogue with History* (1964) argues that "history was for Yeats a mysterious interlocutor, sometimes a bright reflection of the poet's self, sometimes a shadowy force opposed to that self." Some critics chose to focus on some more specific areas, such as Robert Snukal's *High Talk: The Philosophical Poetry of W. B. Yeats* (1973), Daniel A. Harris's *Yeats: Coole Park & Ballylee* (1974), Frank Hughes

Murphy's *Yeats's Early Poetry* (1975).

Upon Yeats's occult interest, George and Margaret Mill Harper show great contribution; but their labor falls mainly on the documentation of Yeats's vision papers. Brendon Maddox suggested that *A Vision* is more like a fiction than a record of séances since no matter how many "controls" Yeats claimed to have participated, there were only two "people" in the room (Maddox xix). Vexed by the unhelpful diagrams, Bloom in *Yeats* doubted the value of *A Vision*, contending that *Per Amica Silencia Lunae* was a better, and sufficient entry to Yeats's system. Hazard Adams in *The Book of Yeats's Vision*, pointing out Bloom's overemphasizing Yeats's romantic vestige, believed that he himself was the first critic to suggest that *A Vision* should be treated as a literary text, and its framework was a lot more important than it appeared to be. Kathleen Raine offered Yeats's connection with Blake and the Golden Dawn, while Giorgio Melchiori discussed the pictorial sources in Yeats's poetry.

Yeats's involvements in politics have received considerable attention. Donald T. Torchiana's *W. B. Yeats and Georgian Ireland* (1966) turned its subject to the poet's politics, as well as Elizabeth Cullingford's *Yeats*,

Ireland and Facism (1981) and Paul Scott Stanfield's *Yeats and Politics in the 1930s* (1988). Torchiana examined the process of the poet's anticipation for an ideal Ireland and his disillusionment after the Rising. Cullingford emphasized that Yeats espoused "an aristocratic liberalism that combined love of individual freedom with respect for the ties of the organic social group" (Cullingford, *Yeats, Ireland, and Facism* 235). Stanfield uncovered the details of the poet's last years.

After Edward W. Said's lecture on "Yeats and Decolonization" (1986), postcolonialism started to take his share in the Yeats scholarship. Kiberd's *Inventing Ireland* (1995), Jahan Ramazani's "Is Yeats a Postcolonial Poet?" (1998), and Jonathan Allison's *Yeats's Political Identities* (1996) are all products in the similar vein.

It was not until Gloria C. Kline's *The Last Courtly Lover* (1983) that feminism was introduced in the scholarship. Kline examined the poet's relationship with women and investigated his obsession for traditional feminine archetypes. Elizabeth Cullingford's *Gender and History in Yeats's Love Poetry* (1993) was another breakthrough, followed by Marjorie Howes's *Yeats's Nations: Gender, Class, and Irishness* (1996) and Deirdre Toomey's edited collection, *Yeats and Women* (1997).

The silhouette of Yeats, however, does not become clearer even after so many critical efforts. With the growth of the Yeats scholarship, the profile of Yeats only seems to have become more blurry. As Finneran once prophesied, that even we cannot deny Parkinson for how Yeats had been so over-documented, the forthcoming editors of Yeats would only “generate new critical studies,” and “the essential greatness of Yeats’s achievement will always inspire new attempts to do ‘justice’ to his work” (Finneran 7).

This thesis intends to focus on the comparison between two poems: “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” and “Sailing to Byzantium.” Both of them signify different stages of Yeats’s life but the comparison with each other somehow does not receive the attention it deserves.

The idea of juxtaposing these two poems came from an essay by R. K. R. Thornton, “How Far is it from Innisfree to Byzantium?” He said the question haunted him when he eliminated certain questions during the preparation for examination papers. Those questions were eliminated because normally the examination time was too short for the students to do them justice, and those questions are often, at the same time, too difficult or obscure. I feel it is a great question to be pursued, and it is a

great pity that Thornton did not do the job very well. Consequently, the aim of this thesis means to supplement what Thornton has left out, and highlight some ideas that Thornton had overlooked.

Discussions on “Sailing to Byzantium” were many, while those on “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” were scarce. David Young even wrote a book solely on *The Tower*, in which “Sailing to Byzantium” opens the collection, emphasizing the significance of the arrangement of poems in the collection and how by that arrangement the collection delivers a greater meaning than that revealed by each individual poem in it. “The Lake Isle of Innisfree,” on the other hand, receives only one significant criticism from Stuart Hunter.

“Sailing to Byzantium” is definitely a complicated poem, not only in its theme or structure, but also in its ambiguous tone and diction, which generates quite a number of interpretations. For examples, Simon O. Lesser spent a full page summarizing the interpretation of Elder Olson, and then used another ten pages claiming that the interpretation was simply “erroneous.” Frederic I. Carpenter, on the other hand, played a pun on Lesser and contended that even Lesser himself was not perfectly correct in reading the four-stanza poem. Lesser had merely made the

poem a “lesser” poem by misinterpreting the masterpiece.

The disagreement did not start from Olson or Lesser, however. As early as in 1955, Harry Modean Campbell pointed out that the main analyses of “Sailing to Byzantium,” which fell roughly into two major groups, are nothing but misinterpretations. One group considered the poem as “more magical than religious [. . .] and its magnificence a little bit forced.” The other thought of the poem as not celebrating any “religious immortality” but “aesthetic [immortality].” Both ignored Yeats’s intellectual experience while writing the poem.

Upon “The Lake Isle of Innisfree,” the discussions were just too little to grow into vehement. Hunter indicates the significance of “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” lies in its transforming the place into a “symbolic landscape.” Although it is a work often “dismissed as a youthful, nostalgic, derivatively romantic lyric,” it is actually a “journey in search of poetic wisdom and spiritual peace, a journey prompted by supernatural urgings, a journey in quest of identity within a tradition” (Hunter 71). And equally noteworthy is the fact that a constant reviser as Yeats leaves the early poem virtually “untouched,” the poem might be in the poet’s eye a “perfect expression” in its poetic development. In addition, when

“one begins to see that the lake isle of Innisfree is more than a place,” one would then come to realize that “like Byzantium, Innisfree is a state of being,” an ideal for the early Yeats (79).

I will compare the two poems in their “final” form. As T. R. Henn says:

[. . .] the two Byzantium poems have been buried under a great mass of exegetical rubble, and that we may lose sight of what they are. It may be well to attempt some simplification. They are great rhetorical poems of a traditional kind, which lament the passing of youth, virility, strength, and which seek to establish, by symbols which are part traditional, part personal, an imagined defense against Time’s decay. They are linked by the theme of Byzantium and the golden bird or cock. The second poem (which I now think wears less well than the other) seems to me more cerebral, less spontaneous, even a little disjointed [. . .] (Henn 236)

And since Yeats wrote “Byzantium” because his friend T. Sturge Moore “objected to the last verse of ‘Sailing to Byzantium’ because a bird made by a goldsmith was just as natural as anything else,” and thought the idea

“needed exposition,”¹ Therefore, I choose not to discuss “Byzantium” here either. In order to respond to Moore, Yeats made his bird in gold into bird in “changeless metal,” but the rest of “Byzantium” is more like a depiction of his imaginative limbo, where no new ideas were added. “Byzantium” is an addition to “Sailing to Byzantium.” It is an attachment rather than a development.

Through close reading, I mean to emphasize there is actually not a gap as big as we imagine between the two poems, though “not a few refused to embark when [Yeats] set sail from the Lake Isle of Innisfree for the less contagious pleasures of an austere Byzantium.” (Ellmann, *The Man and the Mask* 1)

In the first chapter I will examine the points that Thornton brings up, and comment on them. In the second, a more detailed comparison between “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” and “Sailing to Byzantium” will be presented. As for the third chapter, I will turn to compare the two collections of poems that signify the early Yeats and the later Yeats, *The*

¹ “Byzantium” was inspired by Moore’s letter to Yeats, in which Moore said he was “sceptical as to whether mere liberation from existence has any value or probability as a consummation. I prefer with Wittgenstein, whom I dont understand, to think that nothing at all can be said about ultimates, or reality in an ultimate sense. . . . Your *Sailing to Byzantium*, magnificent as the first three stanzas are, lets me down in the fourth, as such a goldsmith’s bird is as much nature as a man’s body, especially if it only sings like Homer and Shakespeare of what is past or passing or to come to Lords and Ladies.” (qtd. in Albright *W. B. Yeats The Poems* 717).

Rose and *The Tower*, to give a larger picture for the discussion. Finally, in the conclusion, I will explain why I reach a conclusion similar to that of Thornton's even though our ideas actually vary in some important ways.



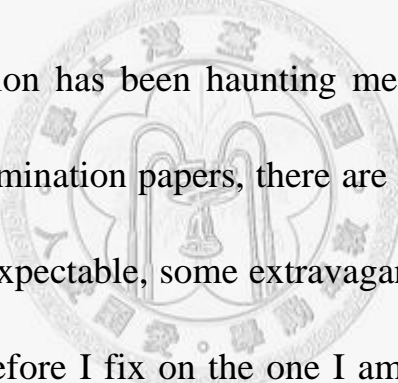
Chapter 1

A Brief Summary on Thornton's Article

“How far is it from Innisfree to Byzantium?”

This is the starting point of Thornton's paper. If indeed we closely examine these poems that built Yeats's fame, we may find a peculiar connection between these two symbolic locales.

Thornton in his paper revealed how he came up with the idea:



This question has been haunting me for years. When I am setting examination papers, there are many questions – some tediously expectable, some extravagantly improbable – that I consider before I fix on the one I am going to use; and it is often the case that the discarded ones are more interesting than those which eventually turn up on the paper. They are put aside because they are too difficult or too obscure or because the students will not have time or space to do them justice, but they stay in the mind of examiner after many of the others have been forgotten. One such question, which I have never dared to ask on an examination paper, is ‘How far

is it from Innisfree to Byzantium?’ I feel that students would perhaps not see what the question was getting at, or find it too extravagantly phrased for the tense time of the examination. Yet it has stuck with me, and the relationship of ‘The Lake Isle of Innisfree’ and the two Byzantium poems, ‘Sailing to Byzantium’ and ‘Byzantium,’ as symbolic poles in Yeats’s work, still seems of interest. How far had Yeats gone between the writing of those memorable poems?

(Thornton 285)

With this confession, Thornton begins his article, and tries to offers several answers for the title question “how far is it from Innisfree to Byzantium?”

Answer one: 1,900 miles

The first answer exclaim the distance is merely “geographical and least interesting.” “Yeats’s poem about the search for the spiritual life,” as Thornton asserts, “is not a geographical journey but a journey out of nature; so the geographical measurement will only provide us with a superficial answer.”

Allowing for my rudimentary method of map-measuring, the distance is about 1,900 miles. Innisfree is an island on Lough Gill in Ireland, one of Yeats's childhood haunts in Sligo. Byzantium is the ancient city on the site of which was built Constantinople or Istanbul. (285)

It is funny that Thornton should make such effort proving this answer to be the least interesting answer of all, but he does make one very important point: the journey would not concern realistic traveling, and it is the imaginative pursuit for spirit that matter.

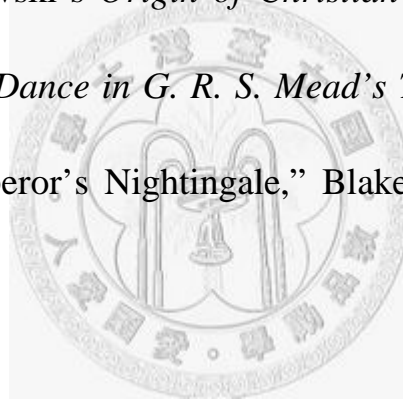
Answer two: a few feet along the bookshelf

“A few feet along the bookshelf” is another uninteresting answer Thornton provides. Even if he wants to emphasize the distance in between, namely, what Yeats had read along the years, he fails to discuss the inward yearning of Yeats and how his wide and eclectic reading affected him.

What is to be noted is the major source for Yeats's Innisfree and Byzantium poems: Innisfree is a place of longing after listening to his father's reading passages out of Walden, and the imagination probably

also came from a tale in William Gregory Wood-Martin's *History of Sligo* (1882).

As for Byzantium, according to Thornton, it is a little more complex but there is "critical consensus" in W. G. Holmes' *The Age of Justinian and Theodora* (1905-7), and O. M. Dalton's *Byzantine Art and Archaeology* (1911). In addition, the following sources also provide great inspiration: Francis Crawford Burkitt's *Early Eastern Christianity* (1904), Josef Strzygowski's *Origin of Christian Church Art* (1923), an article on *The Sacred Dance* in G. R. S. Mead's *The Quest* (1910), Hans Andersen's "The Emperor's Nightingale," Blake, and Samuel Johnson. (qtd. in Thornton 287)



Answer three: 1,300 years

The first significant answer from Thornton marks the distance as "1300 years." It is a meaningful answer as space does not mean much:

"The Lake Isle of Innisfree" is a poem of future and present tenses, of the pavements of the contemporary world creating a longing for an immediate future escape, apparently little concerned with the role which the island might have in the

larger scheme of things, except as a retreat from the world.

[. . .] “Sailing to Byzantium” is not the longing for a future escape, but a record from the other direction, of an arrival.

(288)

Thornton does not go deeper into the comparison of the tenses in the poems. He focuses on the time between the two places. According to Yeats, to live in an island like Innisfree was a dream he had when he was about twenty-two or twenty-three. So it is approximately in the 1880s. As for Byzantium, Yeats set it around the time just before Justinian closed the Academy of Plato in 529.

Thornton does not go further in the issue because it simply seems irrelevant:

Once there, however, historical time seems to become less relevant and, as Gordon and Fletcher suggest, ‘Byzantium in the second poem has move out of history; it has become the City of the Dead and the poet is concerned with the fate of the soul after death.’ Just as Byzantium is not clearly a place, it is not clearly a time either. It belongs to that realm ‘out of nature’ which Yeats, by beginning (or at least planning to

begin) his *Last Poems* with ‘Under Ben Bulben,’ made the location of his final volume. (288)

Answer four: 40 years

Thornton then brings up another intriguing answer: 40 years, which are the years between the publications of the two poems. Yeats must have experienced a lot of changes in life to create two poems so different in tone and style. Disappointedly, Thornton merely points out that “[i]t is an enormous distance for Yeats, who is the poet with the longest apprenticeship in the history of English poetry. Yeats was always remaking himself, and sometimes, rather alarmingly, remaking his poetry in a way that obscures that development.” Thornton does not explain what the development may be, though he does mention that “Yeats intensified his language, made his rhythms more rugged, found more powerful and denser images and enriched his allusiveness.” He does not explain what obscures Yeats’s poetry, and he does not explain what the obscurity is. He says the change of language is a “summary of what had developed in Yeats’s style,” but he does not explicate what the development is, nor what the change of style means in the context.

But one point he mentions does tell us something:

The movement from the conventional nostalgic wistfulness of ‘I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore’ [. . .] to the energetic intellectual violence of ‘Marble of the dancing floor / Break bitter furies of complexity’ (‘Byzantium’, pp. 131-132) is a summary of what had developed in Yeats’s style. (288)

The style of Yeats seems to have grown into a more intellectual one in his late years from a “conventional nostalgic” one. Lines of wistfulness grow into combination of concrete imagery and abstract idea.

Answer five: 15 feet – the height of a pair of stilts

The next idea of Thornton signifies Yeats never really cast off his stilts. Even though Yeats tried rehearsing “stripping off the layers of embroidery or decoration,” he never did “lie down naked.” I agree to the notion to a certain degree, but I doubt the point has much to do with the distance between Innisfree and Byzantium. But Thornton does make an important statement: “Yeats is more interested in the *process* of baring than the naked result – he is a stripper, not a streaker – and his later

poems do not reject decoration, embroidery, even rhetoric, so much as make it a more integral part of the whole.”

Answer six: from antithesis to synthesis

Thornton is right to point out the distance from Innisfree to Byzantium is a process from antithesis to synthesis. But he disappoints us again by beating around the bush and even fails to deliver his promise to make actual comparison between the two poems.

Answer seven: from the country to the city

One obvious answer to the target question proposed by Thornton is the movement from the country to the city, but we probably would not recognize that until Thornton kindly brings it up for us. He seems to say both poems involve moving away, either from country to city or from city to country. In “The Lake Isle of Innisfree,” it is a moving “from pavements to bean-rows”; and in “Sailing to Byzantium,” it is a moving “from ‘no country for old men’ to the Emperor’s pavements of the city of Byzantium.” Thornton seems to insist, too, that the moving is from an ideal to another, which is my main concern in this issue. But he does

indicate that the “dull and uninspirational ‘pavement grey’ are transformed into those flaming pavements of the Emperor.” He even argues that since Yeats had learned from Arthur Symons that the city of Byzantium “could represent the ultimate triumph of man’s imagination,” Yeats’s Byzantium “manages to purge the idea of the city of all its slums and problems so that it is almost the London of William Morris’s *News from Nowhere*.”

Thornton says he is “tempted” to proclaim that the moving away is a “further associated movement from Ireland to Europe, from the early tendency to base [Yeats’s] poetry on Ireland and its myths to his later rejection of Ireland as ‘no country for old men’ and a country which did not give him those universal emblems which he needed, were it not for the fact that his last book of poems is full of Ireland and its history, which includes: Casement, Parnellites, John Kinsella, and the whole cast of ‘The Municipal Gallery Revisited.’” (290) But it is a statement not to be taken as its face value, since Thornton does not explicate the historical connotations of those names and does not provide substantial textual evidence to substantiate his insight.

Answer eight: no distance at all

The last answer, and the most important answer of all, Thornton gives us is “no distance at all.”

Although it is tempting to say that Yeats had developed out of all recognition by the time of his later poetry, one might take seriously Harold Bloom’s insistence on the neglected quality of the earlier verse and question whether there is much distance at all between early and late. The longing for Innisfree was part of a plan that ‘having conquered bodily desire and the inclination of my mind towards women and love, I should live, as Thoreau lived, seeking wisdom.’ Is this not a rejection of ‘the young in one another’s arms’ and a move towards the wisdom to be gained ‘out of nature’? His memory of the story of the island transforms the memory of a realistic place into a mystical place where the food of the gods grew and one could attain to it by defying the monster guarding the tree; but the wisdom would mean death. Do not both the early and the late poems concern the crossing of water to an idealised place where, rejecting sensuous life,

one can find wisdom in and among the song of birds?

The distance from Innisfree to Byzantium is not an outer but an inner journey; not a substitution but an intensification, realising in far more complex symbols the simple truth of his original perception. (290)

This point is a noteworthy one, although it is a pity that Thornton does not expound it. I would try to fill up the gaps that Thornton leaves.



Chapter 2

The Differences and Similarities between Innisfree and Byzantium

In the previous chapter I have presented Thorton's ideas, which concluded that the journey from Innisfree to Byzantium is but an inner, spiritual journey despite some obvious geographical or historical distance between them. Nevertheless, a more detailed comparison of the two poems seemed to have been neglected, without which the conclusion somehow seemed to have come too easily. Consequently, I mean to conduct a more thorough comparison; and by attempting such a supplement I intend to point out how many similarities and differences there are between "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" and "Sailing to Byzantium."

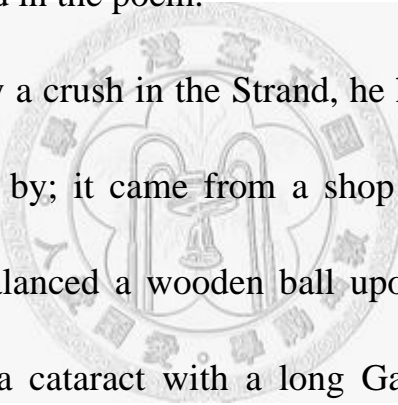
"The Lake Isle of Innisfree," though less discussed critically than "Sailing to Byzantium," preoccupied Yeats's as early as in his youth. In a letter to his friend Katherine Tynan, he included two stanzas of the poem, speaking of the image floating in his head:

Here are two verses I made the other day. There is a beautiful
island of Innisfree of Lough Gill Sligo. A little rocky Island

with a legended past. In my story I make one of the characters when ever he is in trouble long to go away and live alone on that Island – an old day dream of my own. Thinking over his feelings I made these verses about them.

(Thornton 285)

The story he mentioned in the letter refers to his own novel *John Sherman & Dhoya*. In it he exhibited a description for a scene of similar feeling to that expressed in the poem.



Delayed by a crush in the Strand, he heard a faint tickling of water near by; it came from a shop window where a little waterjet balanced a wooden ball upon its point. The sound suggested a cataract with a long Gaelic name, that leaped crying into the Gate of the winds at Ballah. ... He was set dreaming a whole day by walking down one Sunday morning to the border of the Thames – a few hundred yards from his house – and looking at the osier-covered Chiswick eyot. It made him remember an old-day dream of his. The source of the river that passed his garden at home was a certain wood-bordered and islanded lake, whither in childhood he

had often gone blackberry-gathering. At the further end was a little islet called Innisfree. Its rocky centre, covered with many bushes, rose some forty feet above the lake. Often when life and its difficulties had seemed to him like the lessons of some elder boy given to a younger by mistake, it had seemed good to dream of going away to that islet and building a wooden hut there and burning a few years out, rowing to and fro, fishing, or lying on the island slopes by day, and listening at night to the ripple of the water and the quivering of the bushes – full always of unknown creatures – and going out at morning to see the island’s edge marked by the feet of birds. (Yeats, *John Sherman & Dhoya* 92)

From the two passages we know that the idea of going away to a remote isle was not a sudden thought for Yeats. It had been haunting him for a while. It was some “old day dream” of his. It was too important a place, or, more precisely, an idea for him that he not only created a scene for it in his novel but also designated a poem for it. He was too obsessed that he must repeat it to mitigate the obsession.

The importance of going away to a remote isle, however, does not

fall solely upon the action of leaving. The implication of retreat is of equal consequence. By retreat to an isolated place he meant to ignore his association with urban living; and the retreat somehow seems to become a separation that cut him away from the connection of modern living/writing style. At that stage of his life, though he probably was not aware of it, he was avoiding blending himself into a more modern, Victorian style. Instead, he wished he could hold onto the “legended past” and cultivate his skills via hermeticism. Yet, of course, as we now have known, the impetus of bathing himself in the passing romanticism did not really turn him into a romantic. His works at that time, especially “The Lake Isle of Innisfree,” though carrying a certain splendor of belated romanticism, showed some signs of his mastery of his own verse, or — his “own music.”

As for the sources for the Byzantium poems, two famous paragraphs that virtually quoted in every book about Yeats are found in *A Vision*:

With a desire of simplicity of statement I would have preferred to find in the middle [. . .] of the fifth century Phase 12, for that was [. . .] the moment when Byzantium became Byzantium and substituted for formal Roman magnificence,

with its glorification of physical power, an architecture that the Sacred City in the Apocalypse of St. John. I think if I could be given a month of Antiquity and leave to spend it where I chose, I would spend it in Byzantium a little before Justinian opened St. Sophia and closed the Academy of Plato. I think I can find in some little wine-shop some philosophical worker in mosaic who could answer all my questions, the supernatural descending nearer to him than to Plotinus even, for the pride of his delicate skill would make what was an instrument of power to princes and clerics, a murderous madness in the mob, show as a lovely flexible presence like that of a perfect human body.

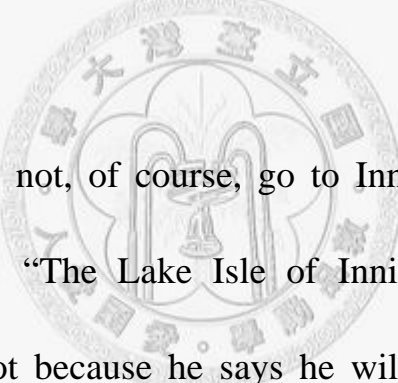
I think that in early Byzantium, maybe never before or since in recorded history, religious, aesthetic and practical life were one, that architect and artificers – though not, it may be, poets, for language had been the instrument of controversy and must have grown abstract – spoke to the multitude and the few alike, The painter, the mosaic worker, the worker in gold and silver, the illuminator of sacred books,

were almost impersonal, almost perhaps without the consciousness of individual design, absorbed in their subject-matter and that the vision of a whole people. They could copy out of old Gospel books those pictures that seemed as sacred as the text, and yet weave all into a vast design, the work of many that seemed the work of one, that made building, picture, pattern, metal-work of rail and lamp, seem but a single image. (Yeats, *A Vision* 279-280)

From the two paragraphs Yeats's idea for Byzantium is clear. He believes that a place like the ancient city must be where his aged soul may rest. That place is perfect because "religious, aesthetic and practical life were one." Although it stands for a certain abstract idea, it speaks to "the multitude and the few alike." It is a "vast design" and a "single image." And that oneness somewhat foreshadows the complicated design of the final product, "Sailing to Byzantium."

Yet "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" is not a simple poem as it seems, especially when juxtaposed with "Sailing to Byzantium." What makes "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" more important than it appears to be is not its thematic or technical significance. It bears no fresh idea, nor any

spectacular poetic skill. Retirement from the world is not startling, and the 12-line statement conjures no surprise at all. What really startles and surprises its readers should be the fact that it is the first time its author speaks directly of his situation at that moment. It is the first time the author does not intend to hide anything. It is the first time the author finds his own voice. Whether he has been to the place does not matter. Adams comments on this point similarly. He thinks that the importance of Innisfree is not the idea it carries, but its meaning to Yeats. He emphasizes that Yeats



[. . .] does not, of course, go to Innisfree, as we know he would not. “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” is an important moment not because he says he will go and does not, but because he takes a stance. The stance may be abstractly implicit earlier, and it may be full of conventional romantic iconography, but this does not matter as long as we view it as a gesture that does not *intend* to hide anything. (Adams, *The Book of Yeats’s Poems* 54)

Before he wrote “The Lake Isle of Innisfree,” Yeats, inheriting romantic tradition from Blake and Shelley, almost sided himself with the

romantics. He even adopted the old-fashioned diction to increase the nostalgic, ancient feeling of his poetry. It was not until this poem that Yeats finally cast away the old style, and claimed that he had found his own voice; and it was by this time that he finally set off from *The Crossway*, ridding off the self-constraining wandering with Oisín. He took a stance. He expressed that he had an Elysium in his mind, and he intended to go there.

“Sailing to Byzantium,” on the other hand, is admittedly a more complicated and ambiguous poem. We cannot even be certain if Yeats is the protagonist of the poem, though oftentimes we simply assume he is according to various clues we acquire from relative material of the poem: Yeats was facing the problem of aging and death. In a BBC broadcast on 8 September 1931, Yeats said that “it is right for an old man to make his soul, and some of my thoughts upon that subject I have put into a poem called ‘Sailing to Byzantium.’ When Irishmen were illuminating the Book of Kells and making the jeweled croziers in the National Museum, Byzantium was the centre of European civilisation and the source of its spiritual philosophy, so I symbolise the search for the spiritual life by a journey to that city” (Jeffares, *A Commentary* 253) In

addition, Yeats's own note to the Byzantium poem indicates that he had read somewhere that a tree made of gold and silver for artificial birds to sing in the Emperor's palace at Byzantium, which might have made up his thought for the symbol in the poem.

However, even if we cannot be certain whether the narrator is Yeats himself, the protagonist "may be described as a symbol of Yeats and of the artist and of man" (Ellmann, *The Man and the Mask* 257). As Henn shrewdly points out, "[. . .] Byzantium might well symbolize a new Ireland breaking away from its masters so that it might develop, or rather return to, its own philosophical, religious and artistic destiny" (Henn 222).

Furthermore, Henn continues to explain:

Byzantium [. . .] has a multiple symbolic value. It stands for the unity of all aspects of life, for perhaps the last time in history. It has inherited the perfection of craftsmanship, and more than craftsmanship, perhaps, the 'mystical mathematics' of perfection of form in all artistic creation. That culture is the inheritor of Greek tradition, in philosophy and handiwork. The disintegration of the 'Galilean

turbulence' has not yet begun. But because it is in the past, it contains in itself, like Egypt to which it is linked, the mysteries of the dead. Memory may think back, with or without the aid of the shade, into the past and learn its secrets, the 'wisdom of the dead.' (Henn 223)

And it is the "multiple symbolic value" that complicates the issue. It may, as well, remind us of Yeats's idea of "unity of being," which concerns a great integrity among a poet's life and work, and the work itself. The Byzantium poem can be interpreted in so many ways, and that makes the work of analyzing it much more difficult than that for "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," which involves, likewise, the poet's yearning but inspires less association, religious, artistic, political, etc.

Basically, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" concerns a trip, a moving from a place to another, and the change resides in the space the narrator dwells; whereas "Sailing to Byzantium" not only concerns a trip but also involves a transformation: the narrator no longer remained in the way he was, and was made into something finer, like iron ore being made into a sword.

Yet the difference between them is not that simple. They vary at least

in a dozen of aspects, charted as following:

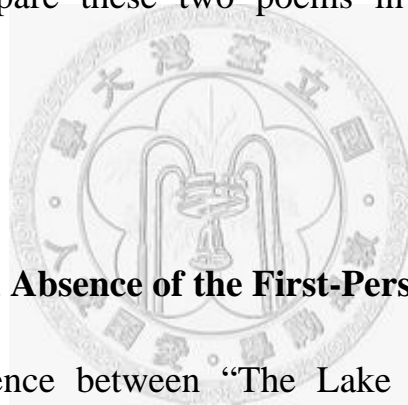
Innisfree	Byzantium
Strong presence of “I”	“I” almost disappears
Retreat from human affairs (mundane business)...hermeticism	Retreat from human form (mundane existence)...mysticism
Loose structure	Well-formed structure
Own music	Song for self-longing and for drowsy emperors (giving away subjectivity)
Local, realistic rural place	Foreign, dead city (culture)
Nature	Civilization

Remote island	Remote city
Close to nature	“Out of nature”
Future tense	Present perfect
Never live there	Never go there
“in the deep heart’s core”	“consume my heart away”
Peace of mind	Peace of soul
A variety of animals, insects, scenery, plants => vigorous living	All animals, fishes, and the like “[c]aught in that sensual music”

As we may see, there are many similarities and differences between the two poems. And in similarities sometimes there are differences; and

in differences there are sometimes similarities. For examples, both poems concern retreat, but what they are escaping from are slightly different. Both poems seek a certain extent of peace, but the levels of the peace are also slightly different. Even if “Sailing to Byzantium” asks for the favor of consuming one’s heart away, it is somehow a reflection of the narrator’s unconscious desire, that is, something “in the deep heart’s core.”

I shall then compare these two poems in a more detailed way according to this chart.



The Presence and Absence of the First-Person Pronoun

One sharp difference between “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” and “Sailing to Byzantium” is the decay of subjectivity. In “The Lake Isle of Innisfree,” the strong subjective “I” is ubiquitous. Not only does it open the poem, it virtually starts the second and the third stanza and literally signifies every thought and action the narrator has in mind. “I” represents the center of the longing, showing how badly the narrator wants to move to the place. “I,” in addition, becomes the center of the poem, and of the ideal retreat, where the narrator would like to live all by

himself, by imagining an exclusive landscape. A cabin will be made; nine bean rows will be planted; a hive and a glade will be found; and they will be owned by the narrator. The changing veil of the day, likewise, will be noticed; and the sound of crickets and the wings of linnets will be collected by the narrator's ears and eyes, that is, exclusive perceptions provided by an exclusive landscape.

What makes the "I" so powerful in the short, 12-line piece is the fact that it appears for seven times and over a half of them are bound with future tense, by which the affirmation of the present is silently made: although future tense indicates that something is not happening now but in a forthcoming future, it actually authorizes the present to make that something happen. It almost seems as if when the decision is made, the action is somehow conjured and done. However, even if a decision is made, it is not carried out; and the promise then evaporates.

On the contrary, the "I" in the Byzantium poem not only misses the beginning, but it also fails to set the tone for the poem. The first time it appears in the text is in the third stanza, where the narrator has already arrived at the ideal city. The intensity and possibility of the present subject is appeased and set calm. There is nothing needed to be done.

The trip is already finished, and nostalgia already satisfied.

As for the second time, which happens to be the last time, the “I” shows itself, it is in the last stanza, where it is crowned by “out of nature.” It thus loses the subjectivity for anything, since it no longer has the power to envision any possibility. This is a swaying from subjectivity to objectivity, a self-tinkering from flesh to artifice, and the cabin-maker’s making himself into a golden bird.

Escapism

Both “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” and “Sailing to Byzantium” are poems of escapism, even though the former is tinged more heavily in its tone and its diction. “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” is an escape from mundane business. “Sailing to Byzantium” is an escape from mundane existence.

In “The Lake Isle of Innisfree,” affirmatively the poet claims that “I will arise and go now,” which indicates that he will no longer stay in the place he is now. It is not an action depending on conditions. It is a direct claim. He does not mean he would go to the place tomorrow, or after he makes a fortune; he means “now.” Even if there is unfinished

work, it does not affect his decision. He has made up his mind.

Only by leaving the busy “roadway” and the dull “pavement grey” can he preserve peace. Only in Innisfree can he live alone and get rid of the city. He does not want to join the jostling crowd, since peace “comes dropping slow.” It can only be obtained in a place where linnets can be seen and crickets can be heard. The poet means to run away from the mundane world. Hermitage is what he is seeking for.

In the case of “Sailing to Byzantium,” however, hermitage cannot satisfy the poet anymore. Breaking away from mundane business is no longer enough for the peace-seeking old man. He first retreats from the country not meant for old people, and then prays for being transformed into an artifact.

He releases himself from mundane business; and he releases himself from mundane existence. He takes off his mortal dress and will never take on forms from “any natural thing.”

The escapism in the two poems, though obvious, does not merely point to a discharge of human affairs or human form. It also implies a possibility of walking away from the measurement of human living – time. Both poems transcend / escape time, but in different manners:

“The Lake Isle of Innisfree” by using future tense wrappings, and “Byzantium” by ridding the cloth of flesh. The concepts of transcending time, or, say, the current state of being, thus look similar but are essentially dissimilar.

Loose Structure vs. Well-formed Structure

The difference between the structures of the two poems marks the artistic styles of Yeats at different stages of life. When Yeats was still young, he found his “own music” in “The Lake Isle of Innisfree.” He no longer wrote like those romantic poets. He had developed his own style.

However, the structure in the Innisfree poem, if compared to “Sailing to Byzantium,” appears to be loose and less refined. Although the poem is built up by some clever techniques like using “I will” to strengthen the eager or counting the hermetic pleasure to increase the appeal of the dreamland, Yeats does not provide a complete background, method, and solution or shape itself into a tight form in narrating or rhythm as he did in “Sailing to Byzantium.”

We only are introduced to the longing of a young man, who probably is tired of the monotonous city life and thus expects a rural one, and what

the young man will do if he goes to the place in “The Lake Isle of Innisfree.” In contrast, in “Sailing to Byzantium,” we are clearly told that the narrator wants to leave the place for another because “[t]hat is no country for old men” and he does not want to be caught in “sensual music” and neglect “monuments of unageing intellect.” Furthermore, we are told that the narrator, to pursue the “monuments of its own magnificence,” goes to Byzantium, where he is gathered by “sages standing in God’s holy fire” into a permanent thing, a Grecian form that keeps a drowsy emperor awake.



Own Music vs. Song for Drowsy Emperors

There is no denying that in “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” Yeats found his “own music,” the style that truly belongs to himself; but it is in this regard discrepancy emerges while Yeats sails to Byzantium from his little, imaginary island.

It is not difficult for us to recognize the dominant “I” figure in “The Lake Isle of Innisfree,” and therefore accept the successful building of self, or subjectivity in the poem. We are, then, hard to ignore the fact that in “Sailing to Byzantium,” ironically, Yeats actually intended to give

up his mortal form and give in to objective permanence. He did not sing for “sensual music” anymore. He no longer sang for cabin made in clay and wattle, bean-rows, honeybee, cricket, linnet, the changing veil of day, or the lake water. He joined the singing school studying monuments and took on the dress of “hammered gold.” He had chosen to become a part of the landscape, or, more precisely, an object in the landscape to witness “what is past, or passing, or to come.”

In the first trip Yeats claimed his own subjectivity, grabbing his own voice from the predecessors. In the second, he put it away, giving his songs to the “singing-masters of [his] soul.” From a person who wanted to control his own fate, Yeats had become a soul-candidate who sought help from the sages of the holy fire perning in a gyre.

Local Place vs. Foreign City

The trips the two poems propose point to different directions. The trip to the island of Innisfree begins from a city of roadway and pavement, and is expected to reach a rural landscape. More importantly, it is a trip from a foreign city (England), or at least an unfamiliar place, to a local country (Ireland). In the case of Byzantium, the situation is quite the

opposite. The trip becomes a journey from a native country to a foreign city, which even does not have strong connection with Yeats's nation in terms of culture. From a country not for old men, Yeats sailed to a foreign city, a dead culture, which is neither a place for old men nor for young folks, to avoid the "sensual music" he once admired and to retreat into the haven of the permanence of artifice.

Nature vs. Civilization

Another sharp difference between "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" and "Sailing to Byzantium" is their physical settings: that of the former is a open field where cabin of wattles and clay standing alone under the veil of day with insects and the sound of lake water, while that of the latter is enshrined in the aura of holy fire and the gleam of golden mosaic. "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" is a place of Nature and change; while "Byzantium" is a civilization well-tinkered by religion and art, both of which to an extent pursue the possibility of eternity, and its protagonist goes "out of nature" voluntarily.

Remote Island vs. Remote City

As some might say that adventures always reside elsewhere, Yeats imagined his own exiles to remote places. In “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” it is a remote island, and in “Sailing to Byzantium” it is a remote city. Whether the ideal realms in the two poems are remote or not, what is more important is probably the meaning of the distance. The sense of “remote” in “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” is realistic, geographical; and that in “Sailing to Byzantium” is imaginative, historical. Unlike Byzantium, Innisfree still existed during Yeats’s time.



Future Tense vs. Present Perfection

Intriguing enough, while applied in “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” is future tense, present perfection is used in “Sailing to Byzantium.” The effort in “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” is something to be accomplished, and that in “Byzantium” is something already taken care of.

The narrator “will arise and go” to Innisfree, which signifies that he is still in the place he is. He has not set off yet. In “Byzantium,” on the other hand, he has already “sailed the seas” and “come” to the city of Byzantium. He is already in that destination. He is standing in a different position. He no longer expects himself to do something to

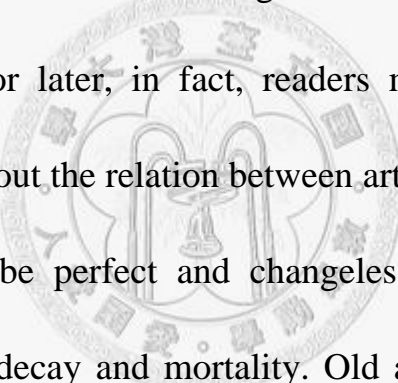
change the status quo but lingers where he was and hesitates in the bottom of his heart. He states that he has already sailed to where he wants to be and mocks at the place where he leaves behind is the one not meant for an old man like him. Although as a matter of fact, this is no evidence that Yeats has become more active or positive than when he was younger; since he did not take any realistic journey in the real life. We can only say he became so “imaginatively.”

To consider the use of present perfect as some kind of effort to transcend time is a hypothesis of mine. But it is at best a coincidence because the sailing in the poem is merely a dream, not even a future possibility. It is just an imaginary action of transcendence.

Even if

[. . .] [w]e thought that the speaker had solved his problems by deciding to abandon the country of change and go to the holy city. (The country-to-city move makes this poem a curious kind of antipastoral, idealizing civilization as against nature.) Instead, he seems to be in a sort of limbo, a threshold state where he must pray to “sages” already in eternity for release from his entrapment in his own body. The analogue

to this situation is of course the Christian's prayer to be taken into heaven, but that this paradise is associated more with aesthetic than religious rewards is indicated by the fact that the sages seem to be part of a splendid mosaic, of the kind Yeats saw in Ravenna and associated with Byzantium, or does it mean that only something as artificial as a city, one filled with artistic accomplishments, can even be the portal to a more perfect and less changeful world? [. . .]



Sooner or later, in fact, readers must consider that this poem is about the relation between artist and work of art. The latter can be perfect and changeless, while the former is subject to decay and mortality. Old age makes the problem especially acute, and that dilemma will pervade this volume by a sixty-three-year-old poet, desperate to reconcile his deteriorating physical condition with the energy and mastery of his imagination and the increasing power of his poems.

(Young 17)

The point raised by Young might have been widely accepted now, as many have seen the connection between artist and artwork in the poem.

However, we cannot be sure if the problem of decay has been solved, since throughout “Sailing to Byzantium” there never appears to be any suggestion for it. One might argue that the solution should be the bird made of changeless metal, but one cannot deny that what is described in the poem is just some fancy made up by an old poet and no one ever conquered the menace of death. Even the poet himself, after his spiritual flight in “Sailing to Byzantium” and “Byzantium” — the purgatory of his — cannot help but yielded to the undefeatable death by accepting what he had in his life — where all ladders begin — in his confessional poem “The Circus Animal’s Desertion.”

Young probably also recognizes that dilemma, so he continues his argument and points out the impossibility of the transcendence:

[. . .] it is also important to recognize that it is [. . .] somehow both a triumphant declaration of artistic independence and an admission that neither art nor the artist can truly transcend time, only imagine and dream such transcendence: both a solution to the problem of old age and a recognition that the problem is insoluble. (Young 19)

Never live in Innisfree vs. Never go to Byzantium

If we read the poems closely enough, we would notice they do share something in common: both of them are gestures rather than actions. They are more like declarations than descriptions. Yeats never lived in Innisfree; and he never went to Byzantium. The poems are personal fancies recorded in the form of poetry. Both poems concern a yearning for a faraway locale; but, more importantly, both poems concern a trip to a place at which Yeats never arrive.

Upon “The Lake Isle of Innisfree,” Yeats wrote in his autobiography, “My father had read to me some passage out of *Walden*, and I thought that having conquered bodily desire and the inclination of my mind towards women and love, I should live, as Thoreau lived, seeking wisdom.” (Yeats, *Autobiographies* 85) But Yeats is not Thoreau, and Innisfree is no Walden. Yeats never went to Innisfree, not to mention gaining any wisdom from living there. Likewise, going to Byzantium and beseech an artisan there for questions of immortality could be a beautiful thought, but any worker is not Plato or Plotinus. A random question from a ghost guest for a ghost dweller hardly may inspire any realistic fruit.

It is more appropriate to say that “Innisfree” is an aspiration of a young man who plans for his retired life than putting it as an equal of Thoreau’s project. It was impossible for him, who said “friends were the only house I have,” to abandon his friends and move there and refuse to pay his tax.

In a similar vein, it is more appropriate to consider “Byzantium” as a description of shards of a dream like Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan” than treating it seriously as the journal of a sacred pilgrimage. A voyage like that, after all, is not really religious. The central concerns of it are the entertainment for emperor and the transformation ceremony before that. Emperor is hardly religious, and the sages appearing in the ceremony should be seen only in some fantasy novels instead of any occasion involving Christianity.

“in the deep heart’s core” vs. “consume my heart away”

This is another evidence that Yeats gave away his subjectivity. Even though he did not move to Innisfree as he once claimed he would, he still had it in his mind. He still had the power to consider it in his heart. Nevertheless, while praying for his heart to be consumed away,

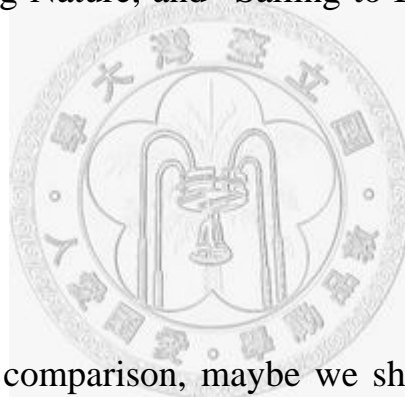
which was fastened to a dying animal like him and knew not what it was, he actually renounced any strength to change what he disliked. “[O]ut of nature” as “artifice of eternity,” he may only witness “whatever is begotten, born, and dies” or “what is past, or passing, or to come” whether he likes them or not. He is a decoration, a polished toy made of stones.

Peace of Mind vs. Peace of Soul

If indeed what Yeats wanted were reflected in the two poems of yearning, in “The Lake Isle of Innisfree,” which includes elaborate description of handmade house, lively living things, and clear sky, Yeats was seeking the peace of mind, which he had difficulty obtaining from the busy streets of London. Similarly, in “Sailing to Byzantium,” in which he admitted to be troubled by “dying generations . . . caught in sensual music,” he was in search of a place, or a state of being that may allow him to shed off his “mortal dress” and rest his soul, which should be gathered into the “artifice of eternity.”

Vigorous living things vs. Dying animals caught in sensual music

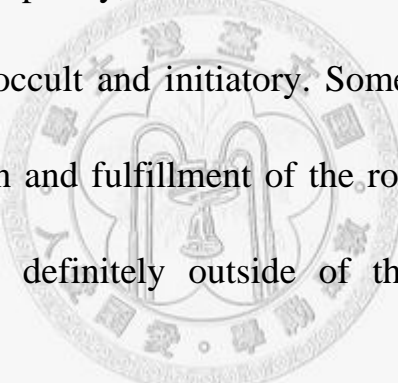
All the living things mentioned by “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” are lively, full of spirit; while those spoken of by “Sailing to Byzantium” are either foolishly carefree, knowing what they are, or simply lifeless: for instances, “the young in one another’s arms,” “birds at their song”; “the salmon-falls,” “the mackerel,” “fish, flesh, or fowl” commending all summer long; “a form” made of “hammered gold and gold enamelling” that is “set upon a golden bough to sing.” “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” is a means of approaching Nature, and “Sailing to Byzantium” is a process of life-elimination.



At the end of the comparison, maybe we should take a closer look into the change of styles of Yeats. Nevertheless, in comparing the early poem and the later one, one must not go astray from the comparison of the early Yeats and the later Yeats, and its ensuing implications. Interpretations of Yeats’s poetry remain balanced to a certain extent as long as they do not come to the discussion of style, where agreements vanish and cacophony occurs. As Paul de Man indicates,

[w]hen it comes to an interpretation of the changes, opinions

vary widely, quantitatively, qualitatively, and historically. Some see a total contrast between the early and the late Yeats, others maintain that it “[. . .] is a development rather than a conversion, a technical change rather than a substantial one.” Some, a majority, see it as a movement toward a more “realistic,” socially responsible, publicly committed poetry, while others stress the increased esotericism and hermeticism of the later poetry, less conventionally “literary” and more avowedly occult and initiatory. Some consider Yeats as the culmination and fulfillment of the romantic tradition, others as moving definitely outside of this tradition. (De Man 148-149)



I agree that a part of the change in style involves a certain extent of moving from a tradition for a new one. The process is more like casting off the influence of the previous age. And in this particular study, I believe what is more noteworthy is the truth that Yeats, even experiencing a great change in how he wrote, never really stopped pursuing the theme of spirit. That is, “[t]he changes of style [. . .] do not necessarily involve thematic transitions. They may be simply “attempts

to eliminate the remnants of conventional romantic diction” (De Man 149).

Consequently, as going too deep into the issue of style might blur the focus here, de Man is right that “[m]aybe, in the end, we should still play conservative in the matter of style. After all, if [it] is indeed the best way of access to the interpretation of Yeats, it is a key that should be used with great caution and with a steady awareness of the intentional principle that determined stylistic peculiarities” (De Man 151).

Moreover, I want to focus my point on the word, “intentional.” It is the key element to the entire stylistic transformation. The point in the comparison is finding out that the changes of style “do not necessarily involve thematic transitions.” The whole change of style, consequently, is but Yeats’s sleight of hand. He intends to wear different coats to impose “discipline” onto himself. As Yeats he himself says:

If we cannot imagine ourselves as different from what we are, and try to assume that second self, we cannot impose a discipline upon ourselves though we may accept one from others. Active virtue, as distinguished from the passive acceptance of a code, is therefore theatrical, consciously

dramatic, the wearing of a mask [. . .] (Yeats, *Mythologies* 334).

Furthermore, he thinks that

[. . .] all happiness depends on having the energy to assume the mask of some other self; that all joyous or creative life is a rebirth as something not oneself – something created in a moment and perpetually renewed; in playing a game like that of a child where one loses the infinite pain of self-realisation, a grotesque or solemn painted face put on that one may haste from the terrors of judgment. An imaginative saturnalia that one may forget reality. Perhaps all the sense and the energies of the world are but the world's flight from the infinite blending beam. (Yeats, *Memoir* 191)

Thus his change of style is more intentional than coincidental, and more pleased than reluctant, although

[a]ny understanding of Yeats' poetry depends upon a realization of his theory of the Mask, and, I believe, some sympathy with that theory. His imagination was by nature intensely active, quick moving, and perpetually excited by

the dramatic qualities of men's lives, and it was therefore natural that he should try to draw into himself those aspects of their personalities which he admired. They served to supply psychological compensations, to reinforce his success or justify his failure, to excuse the evil or folly that he might have done; and it is probable that he had lingering memories of his father's comparison of him to 'disagreeable people,' and was therefore sensitive on the matter. His personality thus oscillated, as it were, between the poles of opposing aspects of personality; one the seeming, the present, the other the wished for, which could, at moments, appear to be justified in action. (Henn 36)

Some critics might dispute on the real meaning of the theory of mask.

For instance, Schrickner argues that

Many critics have misinterpreted Yeats's theory of mask and assumed that Yeats uses the mask to cover personal defects or to add variety to his writings[. . .] This is a cutting criticism for a poet who lectures on sincerity and on "uniting literature once more to personality." Yet almost all of Yeats's

critics have subscribed to this or somewhat milder version of the charge of charlatanry, since few critics see any continuity or integrity in Yeats's lyric voice through the poetic canon. (Schricker 15)

But since the definition of the mask theory is evasive – even Yeats himself did not launch a clear definition, and it is not my major concern here. In the next chapter, I will present a larger comparison between *The Rose* and *The Tower* before launching my final conclusion.

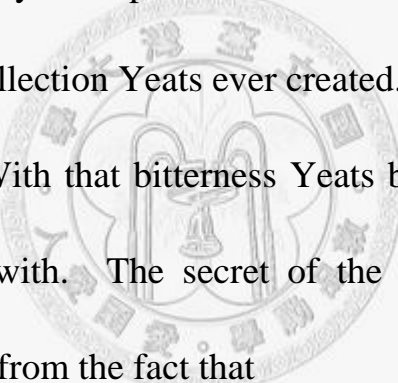


Chapter 3

From *The Rose* to *The Tower*

After comparing “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” and “Sailing to Byzantium,” it is necessary to advance to compare the two collections of poems that include these two poems to observe the difference between the two periods of Yeats.

The Rose is basically a simpler collection than *The Tower*, which is admittedly the finest collection Yeats ever created. In Yeats’s word, it is also the “bitterest.” With that bitterness Yeats built up an artwork few writers may compete with. The secret of the fineness, as Daniel A. Harris says, may result from the fact that



Yeats’s tower dwarfs all critical structures. No compilation of the visual and literary sources which filtered through his imagination as he made his greatest poetry – the “topless towers of Illium,” the towers of Maeterlink, Villiers de L’Isle-Adam, and the Tarot pack – can explain the wholeness of Thoor Ballylee. This is because the tower is not an adopted symbol but an ancient image built anew in Yeats’s

mind; the allusions, the history contained within it belong in the most intimate way to Yeats himself. What is more radical about the tower is how far Yeats managed, poetically, to transmute the *prima materia* of its stone into a spiritual presence without denying the physical solidity of his place.

(Harris 94)

A place in reality is thus elevated in his imagination and turns into a spiritual symbol that not only bathes in the light of sublimation but also carries the weight of reality.

When coming to the comparison of the two books of poems, it is not difficult for us to recognize that both collections employ symbols. The rose is a common, universal symbol. It opens itself to tons of possibilities. It may please Yeats for allowing much more interpretations, but it creates a vagueness that is hardly effective, and weakens the symbol. The rose at least symbolizes the Cabbalistic belief of the Order of the Golden Dawn, though it also contains other elements, such as pagan and Christian, physical and spiritual, as Yeats says in his *Autobiographies*:

I planned a mystical Order [. . .] and for ten years to come

my most impassioned thought was a vain attempt to find philosophy and to create ritual for that Order. I had an unshakable conviction, arising how or whence I cannot tell, that invisible gates would open as they opened for Blake, as they opened for Swedenborg, as they opened for Boehme, and that this philosophy would find its manual of devotion in all imaginative literature and set before Irishmen for special manual an Irish literature which, though made by many minds, would seem a work of a single mind, and turn our places of beauty or legendary association into holy symbols. I do not think this philosophy would be altogether pagan, for it was plain that its symbol must be selected from all those things that had moved men most during many, mainly Christian, centuries.

I thought of a time I could rhyme of love, calling it *The Rose* because the Rose's double meaning; of a fisherman who had 'never a crack' in his heart; of an old woman complaining of the idleness of the young, or of some cheerful fiddler, all those things that 'popular poets' write of, but that I must

someday – on that day when the gates began to open –
become difficult or obscure. With a rhythm that still echoed
Morris I prayed to the Red Rose, to Intellectual Beauty.
(Yeats, *Autobiographies* 253)

The rose, of course, may mean more than these. For instance, it could imply England, or the spiritual beauty that the poet states very clearly in the beginning of the collection. Yet although Yeats wants to be a philosopher, he was just a poet as his father pointed out. Moreover, at the time when the collection was finished, he was not a yet mature one. He adopted a symbol that was too conventional so that he probably lost his own idea in the vagueness; and he did not do a very good job in identifying his own thoughts or conveying them to his readers.

It is obvious that when Yeats reached *The Tower*, his technique had become much better. Not only is *The Tower* a better collection, it also contains some finer poems, poems that have more specific concern and sharper ideas. While the rose is a universal symbol; the tower is extremely personal. It marks his “sharpened apprehension, brought by Ireland’s civil war, of approaching conflagration in the world, and, by approaching age, of ruin and decay” (Jeffares, *A Commentary* 251).

In addition to putting poems of similar themes or subjects together as in *The Rose*, Yeats designed sequence for the poems in *The Tower*.

According to Adams:

There appear to be two deliberate chronological reversals here. The first four poems move backward through tumultuous events to the time of “A Prayer for my Daughter” (dated 1919) of the previous section. The other dated poems, undated ones interposed, seem to have a thematic arrangement that also reverses chronology so that the whole of *The Tower* culminates in “The Gift of Harun Al-Rashid” and “All Soul’s Night” of 1923 and 1920, treating in separate ways the poet’s earlier achievement of a certain occult knowledge. *The Tower* as a whole, then, enacts two reverse movements of memory. The precedent for this can be discovered, without recourse to *A Vision* (where it is discussed in detail), in the earlier “Shepherd and Goatherd,” where the goatherd describes Robert Gregory in death:

Jaunting, journeying

To his own dayspring

He unpacks the loaded pern
Of all 'twas pain or joy to learn,
[.....]
Knowledge he shall unwind
Through victories of the mind.

In the first movement, from “Sailing to Byzantium” backward through “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen,” there is a willful “dreaming back” and “return” through events from a position of achievement. It is as if the meditations that took place between 1919 and 1923 had to be worked through yet again in order for the vantage of Byzantium to have its meaning. (Adams, *The Book of Yeats's Poems* 145-146)

And by arranging the poems in this way, Yeats is actually making “Sailing to Byzantium” both “the first and the last poem of *The Tower*. It is first in that it is the first poem we read. It is last in that it represents the momentary stopping point from which the poet recapitulates his development over almost a decade by means of the willed ‘dreaming back’ and ‘return’” (Adams, *The Book of Yeats's Poems* 147).

Yeats had been making places to become his universal symbols, from *The Rose* to *The Tower*. By doing so, he in a way transcended time, elevating a “spot of time” into an unaging permanence. For example, “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” anticipates his “obsession with a numinous place. The poem is a memory of place now revived to inspire the future, yet with such intensity that expected happiness becomes present joy” (Harris 10). After stating “I shall have some peace,” he rapidly said “peace comes”; “the shift eliminates the island and the future. Chronological time vanishes: morning midnight, noon, and evening swirl in reverie. Midnight and noon, their colors reversed, interpenetrate in unearthly iridescence” (11). On the other hand, in “Sailing to Byzantium,” time is transcended first by its imaginative city, which does not exist in a time past or to come (since it is merely imagination) and by transforming the protagonist into a golden bird that does not decay.

And equally noteworthy is the evolution of the symbol of bird. Although in *The Rose* there is no obvious bird image, in *The Crossway*, the earlier collection of poems, there’s a parrot in “The Indian to His Love” that rages at “his own image in the enameled sea.” When appearing in *The Wild Swans at Coole*, the bird image recurs, and

becomes a swan that does not have his company: “Upon the brimming water among the stones / Are nine-and-fifty swans.” Finally in “Sailing to Byzantium” the bird sheds its mortal dress and become simply a “bird,” rather than a specific kind of bird. It is generalized, or returned to what it is. It no longer wears its sensual coat, but purges itself with “holy fire” and becomes a form that “Grecian goldsmiths make / Of hammered gold and gold enamelling / To keep a drowsy Emperor awake.”

It is extremely intriguing, or amusing, since the three stages of evolutions of bird coincidentally correspond to the three major phases of Yeats’s changes of styles. And it is a shift from a remote island (like Innisfree) for the lovers to his patron’s house, and then to the imaginative city of Byzantium.

The process also marks that Yeats had been alone all the way through. The carefully shaped bird never seems unable to get itself some company. The Indian and his lover have their paradise, the other swans have their company, and the Emperor must have his own concubines. We soon realize that Yeats had been putting himself in the situation of loneliness. In “The Indian to His Love,” the parrot is actually raging at his own

image instead of at the lovers who are having a good time on the romantic island. In “The Wild Swans at Coole” the swan that represents Yeats himself is probably just not there. In other words, “nine-and-fifty” does not necessarily mean fifty-eight plus one. It could also mean sixty minus one. And the excluded one, the missing bird, is probably flying away from the other swans toward Byzantium to have itself cast away its form of natural thing.

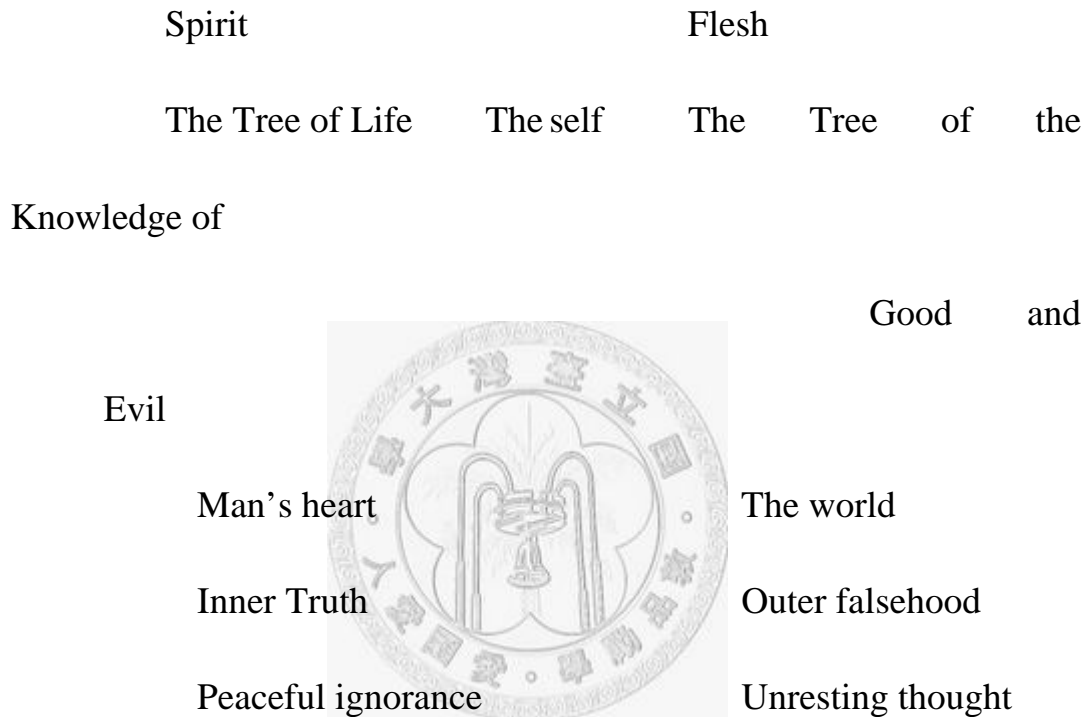
The whole process of the evolution, then, may be considered a spiritual flight of Yeats, who had been bearing the dream and the yearning of transformation since a very early stage of his life. In this way, the Yeats of *The Rose*, namely the early Yeats, is not really very different from the later Yeats in *The Tower*.

As we examine the design for “The Two Trees” of *The Rose*, we may rediscover that the pursuit and interest for the spirit have always been very similar, as Unterecker indicates,

“[t]he important thing to see in Yeats’s poem, however, is not that life is torn between two opposed images – the two “different” trees and their “different” sets of birds – but rather that those images have a direct relationship to one

another. Each reflects precisely one-half of that enigmatic man-shaped cabalistic tree which stands between them.

Diagramed, the pattern is something like this:



Only in name are there two trees. Their images, placed back to back, form one design.” (Unterecker 86)

What is more intriguing is, actually, how Yeats longed for “a mystic wisdom which will compensate for all [mortal] miseries by revealing them as only a portion of a vast and orderly scheme of creation” (Murphy 31).I In *The Tower*, after he had known enough of the miseries and

virtually created an occult system of his own, he turned to seek something that even that mystic wisdom could not satisfy: the transcendence over the mortal existence.

The Rose is a quest for eternal beauty, as Murphy points out, as “an orderly reconciliation of ideal and real, of imagination and action, of eternal and ephemeral” (Murphy 61). Its purpose might be creating a harmony out of the Irish materials he was familiar with. Bloom, emphasizing the romantic influence Yeats received from his predecessors such as Blake and Shelley, argues that the rose poems, which are by no means “a failure” (Bloom, *Yeats* 106), build up Yeats’s own *Song of Experience* in opposition to his first book of poetry, *Crossway*, though Bloom himself admits it is “of course afterthought to find the antithetical quater in the shepherds, Indians, lovers, mad kings, faeries, fishermen, and foxhunters” (105).

It is interesting to identify *The Rose* as an analog to Blake’s early work, but it is, however, not a very clever comparison. *The Rose* is not a quest, nor a longing or an adventure, for mundane sophistication. It cares more about the struggle or conflict between flesh and spirit, the weariness for earthly living, and the mysterious, transient human life. It

is a wandering with dreams, reveries, confusion, and lamentation.

Yeats somewhat realized the earthly existence was but transient, like a dream. So he yelled “To the Rose upon the Rood of Time” that “Red rose, proud rose, sad rose of all my days! / Come near me, while I sing the ancient ways.” He is no different from those preceded him. He sang in the same way as they. Yet he is not pessimistic, for he claimed further that “leave me still / A little space for the rose-breath to fill!” He knew he would diminish like all those passed away before him, but he asked the great Mystery to keep some distance from him, so that he could more or less enjoy the breath of rose, the pleasure of the earthly living; and he rejoiced for finding “under the boughs of love and hate, / In all poor foolish things that live a day, / Eternal beauty wandering on her way.” Furthermore, he considered himself no less than those sang “to sweeten Ireland’s wrong”; nor may he “less be counted one / With Davis, Mangan, Ferguson.” Although he was rather troubled by “the elemental creatures go / About [his] table to and fro” and he would soon leave the world like all former bards in “the winking of an eye,” he “cast [his] heart into [his] rhymes,” that those “in the dim coming times, / May know how [his] heart went with them / After the red-rose-bordered hem.”

In *The Rose* Yeats seldom set his foot on solid ground. What we read are some apostrophes to abstract things, like the Rose upon the Rood of Time; or Fergus being anxious for giving up his crown for some druidical wisdom; or Cuchulain fighting with the tide; or songs or dreams for faeries or paradise; or pity, or sorrow for love. Throughout the volume, there is little exemplum or explication on choosing fruit of knowledge or receiving mundane experience, but much yearning for some place as unearthly like “The Lake Isle of Innisfree.” Great weariness is expressed in the selection; like Yeats said, “We tire of the flame of the meteor, before it can fade and flee.”

In *The Rose* Yeats’s style was mythical, while in *The Tower* he tended to become far more spiritual. In *The Rose* Yeats had begun using dramatic characters to weave his poetry. This is something he never gave up even when he launched the Tower poems. The characters he employed, however, were radically different in these two collections. In *The Rose* the characters seem to be characters coming from the Irish mythology; their appearance signifies Yeats’s particular fascination with the domestic tradition at that time. He intended to borrow poetic strength from what long existed in his culture. He had not cultivated his

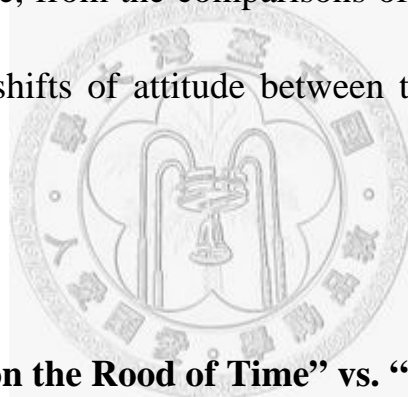
own symbols. He had no muscle at that point. Cuchulain, Fergus, Conchubar, they were all imaginary creations of mythical Ireland. They, in a way, were the fruits of observation and employment of Yeats, which prepared the foundation, together with other occult studies, for Yeats's later psychological representation in *The Tower*.

In Yeats's 1928 collection of poems, the mythical characters were virtually all gone. They were replaced by the solid image of the poet himself or his characters, and his reckoning of the history that he participated in. There was no more catechism with the Druid in the woods, but Owen Aherne and the dancer and the Fool; there was no more fighting with the invulnerable tide, but self-burying into the eternal flame; there were no more lamentation nor stilted speeches, but meditations and prayers; there were no more rose nor mythical Ireland, but the tower and exotic Byzantium and classical myth.

As a matter of fact, Yeats had been working on making a collection of poems as a whole, which constitute a larger meaning when viewed together. However, *The Rose* is not as well-done as *The Tower* as it is a collection of poems of related themes. It is, of course, understandable. Yeats was not even thirty when he wrote *The Rose*. The most important

thing to him at that time might be how to claim himself as a poet no lesser than his predecessors. And his understanding of the occult remained as curiosity to him. His wisdom was yet gained by midnight oil, or emotional toil; although he later would find out, like his fictional character Owen Aherne, that the true wisdom he was seeking, the occult wisdom, could not be acquired from books.

Even the two collections of poems, *The Rose* and *The Tower*, differ in scale and importance, from the comparisons of some of the poems we can still notice some shifts of attitude between the early Yeats and the later Yeats.



“To the Rose Upon the Rood of Time” vs. “Sailing to Byzantium”

In the first poems of the two collections, “To the Rose Upon the Rood of Time” and “Sailing to Byzantium,” Yeats summed up the theme of the collections, like the thesis of a composition. “To the Rose Upon the Rood of Time” is an invocation. The poet calls upon the mystic rose for inspiration. He wishes to find them by experiencing the “rose-breath,” the common life of a mundane living, which comes from “under the boughs of love and hate,” although he must endure the

mortality like “all poor foolish things.” He does know what he is seeking for at this time: the myth (“Cuchulain,” “druid,” “Fergus”), nature (“star,” “sea,” “grass,” “field-mouse,” “weak worm”), and the mystery (“eternal beauty”). He wishes to learn to “chaunt a tongue men do not know.”

In “Sailing to Byzantium,” however, he no longer wants to learn his trade. He hopes to accommodate himself to the “holy fire,” where there is no “singing school” but “studying / Monuments of its own magnificence.” And there he may have his heart – sick with desire / And fastened to a dying animal / [that] knows not what it is” – consumed away, and let himself be gathered into “artifice of eternity.”

While “To the Rose Upon the Rood of Time” is about the living things (weak worm and field-mouse), the once living things (“Sing of Eire and the ancient ways”), and Time itself in “Sailing to Byzantium” cares not about anything that “is past, or passing, or to come.” Time matters not in the imagination. Even the narrator of the poem “have sailed” to Byzantium.

“When You are Old” vs. “Among School Children”

It is a long way for Yeats to have traveled nearly 40 years from a young man who had his trouble begun by his twenties when he saw his dream lady – Maud Gonne –, to a public figure that finally settled down with someone after failing in proposing to the same lady, and her daughter. Unrequited love almost drove him crazy, especially at the moment he heard the news that Gonne was marrying McBride. Even though Lady Gregory bid him to stay with Gonne, he was too weak to stand the frustration of love.

Maud Gonne had always been one of Yeats's major subjects for poetry. In both *The Rose* and *The Tower* he mentions her. It would be interesting, then, to compare how Gonne is presented in them, and how it reflects Yeats of different stages.

“When You Are Old” a better written poem, other than “The Lake Isle of Innisfree,” in *The Rose*, depicts Yeats's imagination of an aged Gonne, who nods by the fire reading his poetry and murmurs to herself how love has fled. The one who truly loves her hides his face among the stars in the night sky. Yeats in this poem seems intends to remind Gonne of accepting him while she is still young, or she may only sigh beside the fire; and, maybe, Yeats has known, at so early a stage of his

life, that Donne would probably not marry him. No matter which possibility is correct, what should be noted in the poem is how Yeats imagines Donne's old age.

When comparing with "Among School Children" of *The Tower*, it is not difficult to realize that these two poems are both related to Maud Donne. One depicts her old age, and the other her childhood. One is a looking forward into the future, and the other is a looking back to the past; and both of the depictions, or reveries, are imaginative. Both are not witnessed by the poet. The shift of emotion and interest, however, is obvious. In "When You Are Old," the poet focuses on the girl that he never has won; and in "Among School Children" the infatuation seems to have faded, and is replaced by a higher concern for how an image of such a beautiful woman, like Helen of Troy, symbolizes for a luring force of destruction to a civilization. The image, though imagined, of course drives the poet wild; but the personal emotion never weighs much anymore. Instead, the poet's concern for the afterlife and "sensual music" is brought out. What troubles the poet is no longer if his dream lady loves him, but how he can rid of the earthly torment that comes from his "troubled heart" and its "foul rag-and-bone shop."

“To Ireland in the Coming Times” vs. “All Souls’ Night”

It becomes more intriguing when we read “To Ireland in the Coming Times” and “All Soul’s Night” after juxtaposing the two foremost poems of the two collections. In “To Ireland in the Coming Times” the poet is quite optimistic and aspiring. Although he somehow knows that he is no less than the elder poets, and that he, even if writing better poetry, would pass away and decay into pure souls like all those before him. What he concerns most – as in “All Souls’ Night” – is his telling “rhymes more than their rhyming tell / Of things discovered in the deep, / Where only body’s laid asleep.” Of course Yeats did not have any slight idea of Byzantium and its meaning for him, but it is evident that he already had a strong belief in spirit, the eternal beauty that may be got access to by exploring the “rose-breath” the proud, sad rose of his day/time exhaled.

The attitude in the poem, that leaving his work as an evidence of living for the coming ones, is rather similar with that in “The New Faces” of *The Tower*, where he makes himself a ghost, an outsider, observing the living ones. While looking at the new faces of the world, or new souls

coming from the Rose of the Rood of Time that take on natural coats, he does not preach to them or tell them what to do or look for anymore. Instead, he appears to become calmer and more indifferent than before; maybe he has truly understood nothing would really change, and he has spent his share of hours and done his labor. He is meant to be replaced by the new faces. There is no need to compare himself to anyone. There is no fitting into any position in history. Nor is there any anxiety or struggle for the influence of the predecessors. Consequently, reasonable is his conjuring his occult master or familiar ones instead of those of his trade in “All Souls’ Night.” All human labor does not mean anything. All must dwindle into the “mummy-cloth” after driving wild by the lunar phases. One has his share of time. He may have some reminiscence for the “wine-breath,” (opposed to “rose-breath”) but only ghost may drink from the “whole wine.”

And from the comparisons of the poems in the two collections of poems, it is not difficult to see even though Yeats grew maturer within the years, and his subjects and themes and techniques and styles all drastically changed, his concern for the spirit remained the same. He is still fascinated by the transience of the phenomenal world.

Conclusion

So what is the distance between Innisfree and Byzantium?

I agree with Thornton, that the distance between Innisfree and Byzantium is “no distance at all.” I, however, disagree with Thornton how he reaches this conclusion.

The distance between the two is “no distance at all,” as Thornton said, because sailing from Innisfree to Byzantium is an inward journey or a spiritual journey. The forty years is but changes of stage of art.

Yet, the trip from Innisfree to Byzantium consumes no distance also because those places are imaginary locales that Yeats had never been to. Innisfree is no Walden, after all; Byzantium exists within the fantasy of Yeats, where no mosaic worker will answer his questions. Both are “escapist” poetry. Both poems are but “masks” that Yeats employed to demonstrate imagined gestures and poses – something Yeats came up with in order to thrust discipline upon himself.

Generally, when speaking of Yeats, it is easy for us to divide his poetic career into three major phases and thus ignore what he pursued all

through his lifetime: the perfection of his art / soul.

It is, nevertheless, interesting tracing the evolution of Yeats's form of soul (if not the form of natural things). In "Indian to His Love" Yeats was a bird raging against his image in the water, and he turned into a golden bird in "Sailing to Byzantium." Many ignore the phase in between: Coole Park, where there were but fifty-nine birds. Some may be inclined to say the missing bird is the company of the lonely Yeats. I, on the other hand, feel it is more probable that the missing company is the natural reflection that Yeats once raged against. In Coole Park, Yeats had already half-transformed from a natural thing into a ghostly thing that cast no shadow in the water.

The Yeats of *The Rose* and the Yeats of *The Tower* are not really very different from each other. The distance between Innisfree and Byzantium, furthermore, does not exist. Yeats had been seeking very similar things throughout his lifetime. What makes his styles and subjects seemly so dissimilar lies in the fact that "for nearly every truth he made or found, he also embraced a counter-truth: that contradicted the first truth, was equally true, and did not negate it"; and "his life and work revolved around a few central preoccupations and themes: the Ireland of

his day, the occult, sexual love, and the power of art to work in and change the world.” (Howes, *Cambridge Companion* 1)

Yeats never launched a final form or style of poetry. If he had lived longer, he might have further revised his verse as he always did. As Bornstein aptly put:

In remaking his poems Yeats remade himself, as his quatrain on the subject reminds us. In so doing, he offers us today a middle ground between the old fixed, stable author and fixed, stable text on the one hand, and the elimination of the author and substitution of endless textual free-play on the other. For what Yeats finally created was a process rather than a product, in which a successive but finite remaking of texts and selves substitutes for the fixing of them. (Bornstein, “Remaking Himself” 356)

Or we should say the chameleon career of his is but some kind of pursuit for different ways of representing a self.

The quest for style was therefore a primary interest of Yeats because it was also a quest for his own character, freed from the accidents of every day. Only through style could he

establish communication with the self which often seemed so different from his floundering quotidian personality that he began to label it his ‘anti-self’, or, as we have seen, his ‘image’. In terms of this quest his passion for revision of his poems turns out to be central and not eccentric in his career; it was part of the process of what he himself described as ‘self-conquest’. (Ellmann, *The Identity of Yeats* 116-117)

What is for certain is, to Yeats, “[t]he final form could never appear” (Parkinson 180). He would not be satisfied with the mask he was wearing at certain point, or the self he created whatsoever. If he was able to live for another fifteen or twenty years, he was very likely to have developed another style.

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