



**Cankaya University**

**GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LITREATURE AND CULTURAL STUDIES**

**DEGREE OF MASTER**

**YEATS AND INSPIRATIONAL WOMAN: VARIOUS VISIONS OF WOMEN IN  
WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS'S POETRY**

**Rand Al-Rezali**

**September 2016**

**CANKAYA UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
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**IN PARTIAL FUFILLMENT OF THE REQUIRMENTS FOR THE**

**DEGREE OF**

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**RAND AI-REZALI**

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Title of the Thesis: **Yeats's and The Inspirational Women: Various Visions of Women in William Butler Yeats's Poetry.**

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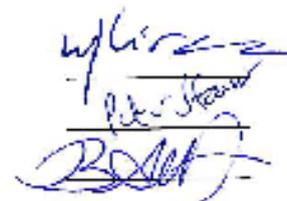
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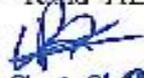
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**ABSTRACT**  
**VARIOUS VISIONS OF WOMEN IN WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS'S**  
**POETRY**

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M.A., English Literature and Cultural Studies  
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This paper presents various visions of women in William Butler Yeats's poetry, most of which are related to his beloved Maud Gonne. In his collection of poems, "A Woman Young and Old" (1933), Yeats uses female imagery to express his concern about women's condition and he wants to call attention to women's oppression and their inferior position in contemporary Irish society. Viewed as a whole, one major figure occupies a central place in Yeats's poetry, his beloved Maud Gonne. His personal experiences –his dreams and desires as well as his conflicts -with her lie in the core of his poetic creation. In Yeats's poetic vision, the rose often becomes an embodiment of his beloved, whose influence on his life and art appears to have been rather paradoxical. While the idealistic vision of Maud Gonne as an image of beauty and grace has often motivated the poet and inspired him to achieve the artistic creativity necessary to write his poems, the real image of his beloved has persistently made him suffer and feel frustrated. Yeats expresses his devotion to Maud Gonne through various female images taken from mythology. Inspired by pre-Raphaelite portraits, decadent writers, and female figures in Irish and Greek mythologies, Yeats's vision of unattainable beloved involves images of seduction and destruction represented by goddesses like Helen, Deirdre, Niamh, and Morrighu.

## ÖZ

### WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS' İN ŞİİRLERİNDE ÇEŞİTLİ KADIN İMGELERİ

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Yüksek Lisans, İngiliz Edebiyatı ve Kültür İncelemeleri

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William Butler Yeats'in şiirlerinde tasvir edilen çeşitli kadın imgelerinin incelendiği bu tezde, söz konusu imgelerden önemli bir bölümünün şairin sevgilisi Maud Gonne'la ilgili olduğu vurgulanmaktadır. "A Woman Young and Old" (1933) ("Genç ve Yaşlı bir Kadın") adlı şiir kitabında Yeats, kadınların toplumdaki durumu konusunda duyduğu kaygıları ifade etmek için kadınları tasvir etmede kullanılan imgeleri tercih eder. Bunu yaparken şair, kadınların maruz kaldıkları toplumsal baskıların yanında dönemin İrlanda toplumunda kadınların ikinci sınıf insan muamelesi görmesi gibi sorunlara dikkat çekmeye çalışır. Genel olarak bakıldığında, Yeats'in şiirlerinde en çok rastlanan kadın figürü Maud Gonne'dır. Şairin sevgilisine duyduğu derin sevgi ve onunla ilişkilerinde yaşadığı çatışmalar şiirlerinde önemli bir yer tutar. Yeats'in yarattığı şiir dünyasında gül imgesi çoğu zaman şairin sevgilisi Maud Gonne'ı simgeler. Bu genç kadının şairin yaşam ve sanatı üzerindeki etkisinin çelişkilerle dolu olduğu söylenebilir. Hayalinde Maud Gonne'ı güzellik ve zerafetiyle ideal bir kadın olarak canlandıran Yeats için sevgilisi şiir yazma sürecinde şairin yaratıcılığını artıran, ona ilham veren yüce bir varlıktır. Oysa, gerçek hayattaki haliyle genç kadın şaire acı çektiren, onu sürekli hüsrana uğratan biridir. Şiirlerinde Maud Gonne'a olan sevgisini ifade ederken Yeats mitolojide kadınlar için yaygın olarak kullanılan imgelere yer verir. Rafael öncesi

portrelerden olduđu kadar geleneksel normlara karşı ıkan, aykırı grüşlü, dekadan yazarlardan da esinlenen Őair, ayrıca İrlanda ve Yunan mitolojilerinde sıka rastlanan kadın figürlerden de etkilenmiŐtir. Yeats'in Őiirlerinde Helen, Deirdre, Niamh ve Morrighu gibi tanrıalar baŐtan ıkarıcı olduđu kadar acı ektiren eriŐilmez sevgiliyi simgeleyen mitolojik kadın figürleri olarak karŐımıza ıkar.



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

STATEMENT OF NON-PLAGIARISM PAGE.....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
ÖZ.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	viii

## CHAPTERS

### CHAPTER I

1.1. Introduction.....	1
1.2 .William Butler Yeats’s Poetic Vision.....	2
1.3. Woman’s Position in Irish Society: A Historical Perspective.....	3
1.4. Factors that led Yeats to become Interested in Using Female Imagery.....	5
1.5. The influence of John Butler Yeats and William Blake on Yeats’s Symbolic Vision.....	6
1.6. Rose as a Symbol of Romantic Love and Imagination in Yeats’s Poetry.....	7
1.7. Helen as a Symbol of Beauty and Power in Yeats’s Poetry.....	8
1.8. Morrighu: A Paradoxical Image of Yeats’s Beloved – Maud Gonne.....	10

### CHAPTER II

2. women’s Oppression during the Post-Revolutionary Ireland.....	12
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CHAPTER III

3. Yeats's Enchantment with the Rose in his Poetic Vision..... 32

CHAPTER IV

4. Maud Gonne as an Image of Beauty Embodied in Visions of Irish and  
Greek Goddesses ..... 44

Conclusion ..... 64

Bibliography..... 68

CurriculumVitae ..... 73





## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This paper will offer some insight into Irish society with a historical perspective; focusing particularly on how the Constitution and the Catholic Church discriminated against women, and on the way female images are used in Yeats's poetry. Within this framework, this study will be mainly concerned with how women, who had an inferior position in Irish society, gained symbolic significance and became central figures in some of Yeats's poems. Special emphasis will be placed on the poems selected from Yeats's collection of verses, particularly on those including various images of women who, with their fascinating beauty, prove to be potentially seductive and destructive in a metaphorical sense. Among the women who, with their beauty and charm, became a source of inspiration for the poet one had a special significance - his beloved, Maud Gonne, whose beauty is often symbolized by the image of the rose. However, the selfsame rose can also be used as a symbol of agony and grief that arises from the feeling of frustration one experiences upon being rejected (Michael Ferber, 176). Thus, the poet is caught between the idealistic image of his beloved, which inspires him to write his poems, and her real image, which constantly makes him suffer and feel frustrated. Interestingly, Yeats expresses mixed feelings for Maud Gonne, often associating her with the seductive and destructive power of mythical figures such as Helen, Deirdre, Niamh, and Morrighu.

## **1.2 William Butler Yeats's Poetic Vision**

Yeats has a poetic vision that synthesizes modern techniques with mythological elements (Maria Camella Dicu, 5). Instead of imitating the established styles of poetry in European literature, Yeats created a new style in poetry by borrowing elements from literature, history and philosophy, which became the primary focus of his art. In fact, he had three major passions: "The one for literature, the one for history and the one for philosophy" (Maria Camella Dicu, 5). Actually, in order to understand Yeats's poetry, the reader should be informed about the Irish history and Irish society who both play a great role in shaping Yeats's artistic creativity in his arts (Maria Camella Dicu, 7).

In his poems, Yeats tries to bring the heritage of human history back into existence, emphasizing the influence of past experiences on the present. Yeats's artistic vision positioned human being at the center of the world and considered man as a part and parcel of the physical world, for he was mainly concerned with what happened in this secular world. Yeats's interest in human existence was connected with man's freedom in making choices and the consequences of these choices (Maria Camella Dicu, 6-7). Commenting on the importance of viewing human existence in a historical context, William Faulkner says, "The past is not the past, it has not even passed. It is with us always because we are not what we are" (Maria Camella Dicu, 6-7). Human beings can hardly separate themselves from their past, nor can they fashion a new life for themselves beyond the influence of their past (Maria Camella Dicu 6-7).

### **1.3 Woman's Position in Irish Society: A Historical Perspective**

An important theme in Yeats's poems is Maud Gonne's struggle to give women a status in society equal to men's. Maud Gonne was a committed feminist who felt dissatisfied with women's position in Irish society. She fought to achieve equal rights for women in a society where women were considered to be inferior to men and subjected to many forms of oppression. This was mainly due to the influence of the Catholic Church inside the government whose pressure on the parliament was so strong that laws passed by the government mostly discriminated against women, which significantly restricted women's role in social life (Stephanie Anketell, 54). There are three main reasons for considering women, and especially mothers, as unworthy in the history of Ireland. The first one is that most of the writers who were interested in writing history were males, and what they did served to limit women's role in Irish history. The second reason is that Irish men who were interested in writing history focused primarily on famous men of politics rather than on women. The third reason is that since most women were unemployed or deprived of a salary of their own, they were regarded as inferior beings (Stephanie Anketell, 56).

Women's individuality and independence were severely limited during the period following colonization. As Gosta Esping Anderson points out in his article "Women in a New Welfare State", "Women's economic dependence was near absolute in post-war decades. This dependency was doubly reinforced because few married women worked and if they did, their wages were typically low" (Gosta Anderson, 599). The government of the Free State in Ireland attempted to keep on controlling the participation of women in Irish society. The law of 1922 granted women the right to vote and get a job and position in the government equal to men's. Yet, this bill was soon followed by another legislation which refused Irish women the right to engage in political activities (Stephanie Anketell, 56). With the Employment Act passed in 1935, women were excluded from working in certain sectors and positions in country. Religious people pointed out the immorality and corruption of women's employment outside their house, and how this right would

decline the ethics of society by passing and spreading it to the whole country (Stephanie Anketell, 58).

In 1937, the Irish constitution dictated that a woman's role in society was to be defined "within the home" (Stephanie Anketell, 57). Under "the Marriage Bar", women working in the public and civil service had to resign as soon as they married. When they left work, many women lost their social security under the welfare system, and they were either deprived of a state pension when they retired or had to live on a smaller state pension. A wife's income was considered to be her husband's, and a woman was not entitled to unemployment benefits as it was assumed that some man would provide for her" (Stephanie Anketell, 60). Motherhood was recognized as a significant institution that would connect the family to the established system of the Roman Catholic Church (Stephanie Anketell, 57). As Tom Ingles argues in his book *Moral Monopoly*, "the church could be understood as an organized system of power which conditioned and limited what Irish people did and said" (Tom Ingles, 193).

The only way mothers could gain the approval of the clergy was to raise their children according to the dictates of the Roman Catholic Church. Fulfilling duties and responsibilities such as teaching their kids, taking care of the sick, the elderly, and people who terminally ill; mothers came to acquire a way of looking at the world similar to that of the clergy. Thus, the mother's duty and position became the foundation on which the church spread and flourished successfully. By performing their motherly duties and thus acting in accordance with the teachings of the Catholic Church, women found it easier to cope with the material difficulties and economic injustices they were experiencing (Stephanie Anketell, 57).

The idea that man was the sole "breadwinner" in Irish society resulted in the exclusion of women from the labor market. In the post-colonial period, the government defined a woman's role in society as limited to doing chores at home where they would contribute to sustaining the traditional values upheld by the government and the Roman Catholic Church. Based on the established norms, man was the only one responsible for supporting the family (Stephanie Anketell, 57-58). This biased attitude in favor of men can be clearly seen in what Hoff and Coulter say regarding their dominant position in society: "If employment is to be balanced in the

Free State government, certain avenues must be reserved for men” (Hoff and Coulter, 109).

The Catholic Church presented women as powerless, delicate, vulnerable, which suggested that they had to be safeguarded by the government and clergy people. As Inglis points out:

This was not just a strategy of the Catholic Church but was part of a wider puritan strategy by which women were forced into exaggerated femininity, magnifying their relative weakness into complete helplessness, their emotionality into hysteria and their sensitivity into a delicacy which must be protected from all contact with the outside world (Tom Inglis, 188).

#### **1.4 Factors that led Yeats to become interested in using female imagery**

Yeats’s interest in depicting female figures in his poetry can be accounted for by the influence of three important women on his life. To start with, Yeats had a strong relationship that spiritually united him with his mother, whose narrative tales were interspersed with beautiful songs jointly recited by fishermen. In addition, Yeats’s mother had a deep passion for her motherland Ireland, especially Sligo, the city where Yeats and his brothers spent most of their childhood. Sligo reflects the poet’s fascination with Ireland as a geographic region and with the Irish traditional story. All these factors became a source of spiritual inspiration for Yeats, a driving force behind his interest in writing poems dealing with women (Maria Camella Dicu, 8).

Another woman who contributed to Yeats’s artistic creativity was Lady Augusta Gregory, who encouraged Yeats to include in his writing elements from the Irish mythology and tradition. Thenceforth, Yeats started to include in his poems stories and characters taken from Irish history and mythology. The poet’s strong bond to Lady Augusta was also due to the fact that she was the only one who looked after Yeats in his sickness, and guided him to the right way whenever his love for Maud Gonne caused him to suffer and feel lost (Maria Camella Dicu, 9).

Yeats unrestrained love, passion, and feeling for Maud Gonne is the theme of his poetry. In fact, a major subject in Yeats’s poetry is his deep passion for with Maud Gonne and the frustration he felt over his failure to gain her. In fact, the most

inspirational event in Yeats's entire life was his first encounter with Maud Gonne a woman whom Yeats was in love with for thirty years. Yeats was endlessly devoted to and preoccupied with Maud Gonne's character, charisma and her personality. In addition, his deep respect for Maud Gonne's physical beauty and her bravery in representing Irish women caused him to propose to her many times. Yeats never felt discouraged by her rejection - the more Maud Gonne refused his proposal, the more he asked her. Actually, her constant refusal only served to strengthen his passion and love for her. In each one of his poems about women, Yeats clearly expresses his loyalty and respect for Maud Gonne. Though there are times when Yeats felt depressed by Maud Gonne's rejections, his hopes to win her heart never faded away; thus, the theme of unrequited love appears repeatedly in Yeats's poetry. However, the poet is able to turn his depressed state, his interminable suffering, into an artistic creation in his attempt to express his never-ending love for Maud Gonne (Maria Camella Dicu, 9).

### **1.5 The influence of John Butler Yeats and William Blake on Yeats's Symbolic Vision**

Another major influence on Yeats's career was his father, John Butler Yeats, who, as a painter, proved to be a great source of inspiration for the development of the poet's artwork. (Young Rhee, 2000). Yeats passionately acknowledged and valued his father for his contribution to the development of his artistic creativity as a poet (Maria Camella Dicu, 8).

Having grown up in an environment surrounded by painters and poets, Yeats had developed a tendency toward taking interest in artists and artistic works. Among the well-known artists of the time was William Blake, whose poems and paintings seemed to have had a strong influence on Yeats's artistic creation. Yeats wrote two essays concerning William Blake's style in poetry: "Symbolism in Painting" (1898) and "The Symbolism in Poetry" (1900). These two essays reveal the way William Blake's artistic vision influenced Yeats's poetic style. After this close contact with William Blake, Yeats's poetry became simpler and clearer, yet deeper in meaning, and more vivid because of its symbolic implications (Young Rhee, 2000). Commenting on Yeats's poetry, William Blake said "Vision or imagination - meaning symbolism by these words - is a representation of what actually exists,

really or unchangeably.” Yeats confirmed this point when he remarked, “All art that is not mere story-telling, or mere portraiture, is symbolic.” (Young Rhee, 189).

Inspired by William Blake, Yeats came to comprehend the true meaning of nature in imagination, art and symbolism, which becomes clear in his statement that “Art and poetry, by constantly using symbolism, continually remind us that nature itself is a symbol” (Arianna, 26). According to Yeats, the use of symbolism will enable the poet to bring art and poetry closer to nature. At the same time, symbolic expressions have the power to bring the poet and his art closer to his inner world. In fact, symbolism grants the poet the power to put together all the ideas of poetry, art, and nature under one principle, one united natural language, one essential vision or imagination (Arianna, 27).

Symbolism is an expression or group of words which represent a physical object or specific situation in the physical world. This object or event indicates a certain thing or variety of references thought to be valuable since it is far removed from the object itself (Krishma Chaudhary, 12). The concept of symbolism offers a possible way for Yeats to convey “the richness of man’s deeper reality which is something essentially mystical.” (Should be at the beginning of this part only) Once Yeats said, “One of the effects of his knowledge of symbols is that the moon may be more than just a moon, and a flower more than a flower” (Krishma Chaudhary, 14). Among the symbols commonly found in Yeats’s poetry are images taken from the material world such as roses, birds, goddesses, etc. (Krishma Chaudhary, 13).

### **1.6 Rose as a Symbol of Romantic Love and Imagination in Yeats’s Poetry**

Since ancient times, the rose has always been a favorite flower that has become a source of inspiration for poets. At first Greek tragedians didn’t seem to give much importance to the rose, but eventually the rose came to gain significance as a symbol of dramatic expression: “It is the flower of flowers, their glory, their queen, their quintessence” (Michael Ferber, 173). The Greek poet Anacreon, known for his short songs celebrating and praising love, pointed out that the rose is “The graceful plant of the Muses”. On the other hand, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1842), the German poet, dramatist and novelist, considered the rose figure to be the most essential one among the flowers (Michael Ferber, 173). Commenting on the special significance of the rose as a poetic symbol, Michael Ferber says “Almost any flower

can represent a girl, but the rose has always stood for the most beautiful, the most beloved” (Michael Ferber, 173). As a symbol of romantic love, the rose represents beautiful and pleasant existence (Krishma Chaudhary, 13). Of the many kinds of roses selected from the natural world, the red rose has often been used as a symbol of love and ideal beauty (Michael Ferber, 172). In his preface to the edition of *The Rose* poems, Yeats declares that the poems are “the only pathway where I can hope to see with my own eyes the Eternal Rose of beauty”. Thus, In Yeats’s poetic vision “the central image of the rose is a symbol of Gonne as well as Ireland” (Susan Ahmed, 17).

### **1.7 Helen as a Symbol of Beauty and Power in Yeats’s Poetry**

Yeats expresses his great love and admiration for his beloved, Maud Gonne, by singing poems to honor her. Having fallen in love with her, Yeats has an intense desire to win the favor of this lively, powerful, and energetic woman. In fact, the more unattainable the goddess figure becomes, the more likely she is to be associated with power (Comak, 21). As a muse and goddess, Maud Gonne has inspired Yeats with her charm and beauty. Hence, she is strongly reminiscent of the archetypal female figure Helen, who is considered to be the embodiment of divine beauty. What makes the image of Helen so appealing to Yeats is that, apart from being a goddess; she is a curious blend of eternal wisdom, beauty, and of destruction (Comak, 8, 9, 17).

Helen’s beauty and power can be clearly seen in Yeats’s poem “No Second Troy”, in which Maud Gonne is described as having the same characteristics as Helen of Troy, her beauty being associated with the image of a “tightened bow” (Marjorie Howes , John Kelly , 176).

Much of Yeats's poetry involves elements taken from the Irish myth and folklore. Once he stated that “I am an Irish poet, looking to my own people for my ultimate best audience and trying to express the things that interest them and which will make them care for the land in which they live” (Declan Kiely, 3). Yeats was trying to revive the Irish literature with its folklore, history, and mythology as he introduced the names of important figures from Irish history and mythology in an attempt to make them more familiar to the Irish audience and society. Irish people did not have enough knowledge of their own cultural heritage since it had long remained under the shadow of the Greek mythology. In the following quote, Yeats

clearly pointed out the reason why he preferred to use elements from Irish mythology along with those from the Greek mythology: “The Greeks looked within their borders, and we, like them, have a history fuller than any modern history of imaginative events: and legends which surpass, as I think, all legends but theirs in wild beauty, and in our land, as in theirs, there is no river or mountain that is not associated in the memory with some event or legend; while political reasons have made love of country, as I think, even greater among us than among them” (Declan Kiely, 3-4).

Yeats’s interest in depicting Maud Gonne through the image of Helen can be found in two of his poems - “The Rose of the World” and “The Sorrow of Love”. Apart from being considered one of the rose poems in which Maud Gonne is portrayed as a beautiful flower, “The Rose of the World” is a poem where Maud Gonne is depicted as a woman who represents a combination of two mythologies. First, she is compared to Helen, the famous goddess from the Greek mythology, who is represented by the image of a tightened bow, and then an analogy is drawn between Maud Gonne and “Deirdre of the Sorrows” from the Irish mythology (Peter Alderson, 176). The theme of the poem is eternal beauty and “femme fatal” embodied in the images of Helen and Deirdre (Comak, 17-18).

“The Sorrow of Love”, a well-known poem by Yeats, reflects the way the poet’s imagination is unsettled by the perception of Maud Gonne’s real image, which suggests that the poet’s perception of her beauty is ambivalent, just like the way he conceives of Helen. (Comak, 20). The poem clearly discusses a situation in which Yeats indulges himself in the pleasure of imaging Maud Gonne as the “brilliant moon” and “all the famous harmony of leaves”. But then, Yeats’s imagination is suddenly disrupted by an unpleasant sensation -the perception of the image of Maud Gonne as she really is. Here, Yeats compares and contrasts the harmony and peacefulness of the first stanza with the chaos and mess caused by the agonizing perception presented in the third stanza. These two stanzas involve contradicting images that reflect the poet’s ambivalent feelings toward his beloved (Unterecker, 80-81).

In another poem, “The Wandering of Oisín”, the description of Niamh, the goddess, carries some similarities to the way Helen of Troy is described - particularly in the sense that loving a lady of this kind will cause a great threat to her lover. Oisín

is tempted by Niamh to leave his homeland, Ireland, for the land of everlasting youth, where she offers him great fulfillment, pleasure, and love. After living in the land of eternal youth for some time, Oisín wants to return to Ireland. However, the moment he steps on his country he gets old and dies. The curious mixture of love and suffering, so typical of Yeats's poetry, is clearly illustrated in the image of a woman who attracts her lover with the promise of love, yet will ultimately cause damage, and finally death (Comak, 7).

### **1.8 Morrighu: A Paradoxical Image of Yeats's Beloved - Maud Gonne**

In world mythology, the Goddess of the Earth, also known as Mother Earth, has the function of reproducing, fertilizing, and giving birth. Paradoxically however, she is also known to be capable of destroying and devouring the dead body (Nina Yurchenkova, 173).

Morrighu – in Irish tradition- is the goddess of war, fertility, and vegetation. She is at once “generative” and “destructive” – while as the goddess of growth and fertility it gives life, as the goddess of war it causes fatal damage and disaster. (Michael Jordan, 203-204).

A Celtic goddess, Morrighu is an integral part of the land rather than a deity from a tribe. Like Irish kings, Morrighu is active, energetic, and strong. At times, she would appear to be a young lady; at another time she would assume the appearance of an old, ugly woman. In her second form, Morrighu represents the exile or execution of a king who has lost his vitality and strength (Michael Jordan, 204). As the goddess of fertility, the Morrighu is “more into utilizing Earth energy — which is very nice to know. A Dark Green Goddess from the Emerald Isle”- the poetic name for Ireland due to its green country sides (Peter J Allen, Chas Saunders, 1). Viewed from this perspective, the relationship between the beloved and the lover signifies the strong bond that exists between the mother country and the man's willingness to make himself a martyr for his own country (Patrick. J. Kean, 27). A goddess with deep feelings, Morrighu is capable of loving and expressing her feelings to her lover (Peter J Allen, Chas Saunders, 1).

“The Cap and Bells” takes as its theme the interaction between the image of the queen as the beloved and the jester as a lover - a man's total sacrifice to a beautiful

goddess (Patrick. J. Kean, 27). The mother goddess desires and calls for an offering, yet she will accept the young man's offering on the condition that it will be a total sacrifice (Patrick. J. Kean, xiii). In the poem, Yeats portrays the Gaelic goddess, Morrighu, whose paradoxical attributes are suggestive of Maud Gonne's ambivalent nature (Patrick. J. Kean, 26). The 'jester' (the clown), who stands for Yeats himself, metaphorically presents and sacrifices his own creative power, natural ability, and love so that Maud Gonne will accept him(Patrick. J. Kean, 27). Determined to win his beloved's favor, the jester offers himself up to the mother goddess, kneeling down to the queen's feet (Patrick. J. Kean, xiii). At last, the queen accepts the young man's proposal, which represents the eternal union of the queen and the jester (Lawrence Saylor, 8).



## CHAPTER II

### **Women's Oppression during the Post-Revolutionary Ireland**

The “Irishness” of the post-revolutionary Ireland was the main concern of the government, society, and the Catholic Church. The “Irishness” meant that society; government and the church put their nation at the center of their attempt to define their individuality and their origins and uniqueness among other countries. This insistence on Irishness and the search for the Irish identity led the country to represent this uniqueness in so-called notion of the “Free State”. The “Free State” government set itself firmly against all aspects of modern life, which found reflection in garments, behaviors, job opportunities and morals. This conservative attitude caused women to be deprived of the chance to achieve an equal status to men. This kind of mentality which dominated Ireland at the time was heavily influenced by the teachings of the Catholic Church since a large number of people believed in the Catholic Church teachings inside the community of Ireland. (Marjorie Howes, 139)

After the Anglo-Irish war, Yeats was concerned with the dominant rules in the political and social teachings of Catholic Church or the “Free State”. This Free State, which had been ruled by the Catholic Church, cooperated with the government. This cooperation imposed many restrictive rules upon women's activities, job opportunities, and their freedom to choose their partners in marriage. Women's attempts to find access to work or to choose their husbands were considered as a potential threat to the established values of Irish culture. The Free State's social teachings concerning morals, jobs, and every aspect of live were imposed on women in the early 19th century. This period was marked by an enormous rise in the number of priests and that gave them more power to control both women and moral issues. These restrictive rules along with the increase in the number of priests coincided with the rise in the number of nuns inside the country. The nuns' role inside their community was to teach and educate people; they were civilized, educated, and

distinguished females. At the same time, nuns were known to be religious, single, passive, and obedient women (Marjorie Howes, 139).

In order to understand the community's attitude to women in that era, the constitutions of Catholic Church should be explained and discussed in detail. The first constitution, which was laid down in 1935, had a negative effect on women's work life and their occupations. Gradually, the number of women working in factories began to decrease while married women became deprived of the opportunity to work inside these factories. The Eamon De Valera's 1937 constitution banned women from getting divorced. This constitution was laid down because the Catholic Church believed that women's best area of activity would be their home and their families. These laws reveal that the Catholic Church had a great part and influence on a large number of people in Ireland. The rules that have been set by the Free State of Irish nationality insisted that women best serve their duties as both wives and mothers. The laws of the Catholic Church had a conservative attitude toward women which prevented them from enjoying their lives as free and independent individuals. The cultural values of the Catholic Church considered women's desires of being free, independent and having an opportunity to work as unsafe and insecure desires to the Catholic teachings in their community. The Catholic Church also believed that women's desires to resist the enforcement of the traditional values and roles assigned to them was a dangerous threat to the ideal of the Catholic woman (Marjorie Howes, 139).

The end of 19th century and the beginning of 20th century were periods marked by women's emigration to England in great numbers. Most of these women were not married – almost 90%. They were mostly at the age of 15-35. In addition, unmarried women did not have the opportunity to work in jobs that were widely available to men. These women were not searching for men to marry; rather, they were trying to enjoy a good economic situation and to achieve their independence by finding access to new job opportunities (Marjorie Howes, 139).

William Butler Yeats was against all the unfair rules of the Catholic communal principle that restrained women from being themselves as free and independent individuals. In 1920, Yeats declared his opinion in his speech about those restrictive constitutions and unfair laws saying, "If you show that this country,

Southern Ireland, is going to be governed by Catholic ideas and by Catholic ideas alone, you will never get the north.” (Marjorie Howes, 139).

Yeats recognized the Irishness not as the national self-definition which has been set by the Catholic Church, but as nothing more than repressive, offensive rules against women. Instead of enjoying their independence, young women found themselves restrained by the laws of the Catholic Church, which led them to fight for their rights (Marjorie Howes, 140). Yeats’s point of view concerning the Catholicism and Catholic Church finds a clear expression in his famous statement: “An Ignorant form of Catholicism is my enemy” (Marjorie Howes, 141).

The public image of women has been clearly presented by Yeats’s poems in “A Woman Young and Old” (1933); this collection of poems was a reaction to the extremist teachings of the Catholic Church and the laws which it imposed on women’s role in society. In this collection, one can easily note a deep insight into and reaction against the restrictive laws and the traditional values of the Catholic Church, which have always been an integral part of Irish nationality and individuality. Yeats concentrates on the personification and characterization of the female image rather than focusing on women’s physical appearance. By so doing, he criticizes the Catholic Church for its inhuman attitude toward women and its tendency to see them as inferior beings (Marjorie Howes, 144).

In “A Woman Young and Old”, Yeats deals with the idea of femininity and women’s freedom to choose their partners, which was restrained by the Catholic Church. In this collection of poems, female characters voice their own rights in the community. Yeats’s women in this sequence are against the established norms of the society and the rules of Catholic Church (Marjorie Howes, 144).

The poem titled “Father and Child” builds around a conversation between two people. It is about the father’s objection to his daughter’s freedom to choose her lover as her partner in marriage. Another poem included in the same collection is “Before the World Was Made”, in which the female figure uses the beauty products as a way of defending her voice against a community that considers her as no more than a “thing” and sexual tool. A woman should give importance to her physical appearance not to attract the attention of others, but to look more beautiful to her husband. In a society dominated by male values, women are considered to be inferior beings who are not supposed to have much contact with the

outside world. In this poem, the woman asks her lover not to think that she is using the beauty products to attract other men. Actually, she is using these products just because she wants to look beautiful, which is a way for her to enjoy her freedom (Marjorie Howes, 144).

Another poem involving a female figure is “First Confession”, in which a woman is parodying in a comic way what is happening in the marital match-making process. In this poem, the woman’s desire to be an independent person is hampered by her sexual bodily desire, which she becomes aware of only after she makes fun of the marital match-making. It is a conflict that takes the woman away from her inner-truth, thus causing her to lose her identity as a strong independent female. In another poem, “Her Triumph”, a woman is having a dialogue with her lover and requesting him to free her from the danger of confinement under the “dragon will”. The dragon symbolizes the society which demands that the female figure be a flirting woman in public match-making. In addition, the society requires that the female be just a beautiful “thing”, like a statue, and a sexual tool to whom man will show little respect. In response to the woman’s request, her lover liberates her from this undesirable situation and sets her free (Marjorie Howes, 144).

#### Father and Child

She hears me strike the board and say  
That she is under ban  
Of all good men and women,  
Being mentioned with a man  
That has the worst of all bad names;  
And thereupon replies  
That his hair is beautiful,  
Cold as the March wind his eyes.

(270 CP)

The first poem selected for discussion, “Father and Child”, builds around the ideas of the father figure, who has been deeply influenced by the teachings of the Catholic Church. The father -the speaker- wishes that his daughter would choose the right partner in marriage. Actually, in this poem the father’s rejection of his

daughter's partner is a reflection of the society's insistence on keeping the female child under control and within limits. The words "Ban" and "Father" are suggestive of the father's strong disapproval of his daughter's desires on moral grounds: "She hears me strike the board and say, / That she is under ban." (Marjorie Howes, 147).

In the following lines, it seems obvious that the female character is not allowed to talk about or make choices according to her desires, let alone question her rights. The father's hostile attitude toward the female gender leads her to suppress her female desires. This hostile attitude is associated with the high morals, values, and the high level of merits of the community which restrain the freedom of female gender (Marjorie Howes, 147).

Also, if she is going to ask for her rights, she will have a bad reputation as a woman with notorious actions. The fact that she is seen together with her lover in public would give her a notorious reputation. Moreover, the line "Being mentioned with man" contains another indication of women's inferior position in society. If she is seen with her lover, she will be considered as nothing (Marjorie Howes, 147).

"His hair is beautiful, / Cold as the March wind his eyes." In these lines, the female figure voices the beauty of that man as well as the way she is attracted to him. Her appreciation of male beauty stands in opposition to the crucial enforcement of society (Marjorie Howes, Page 147). As David A. Ross suggests, "Farther and Child" is one of the poems in which Yeats portrays a female figure expressing her wishes in choosing her lover, which is considered improper within the traditional and religious values of the Irish community. The father voices the authority of traditional values and norms over women's lives. Yet, the restrictive ways of the father in dealing with his daughter are considered by the female figure not so powerful as the influence of the man's beauty. Despite the physical beauty of her lover, the girl can feel that he is lacking in warmth of feeling, and that he is not emotional (David A Ross, 291).

The metaphoric way of using the word "cold" in reference to the men's eyes suggests that he is devoid of any kind of feeling, and that he is able to control his passion. This description of the man by the female figure indicates the woman's recognition and insights of her emotion, thought, and action which are free from corruption. On the other hand, the father is unable to comprehend and recognize the woman's feelings toward her lover (David A Ross, 291).

Before The World Was Made

If I make the lashes dark  
And the eyes more bright  
And the lips more scarlet,  
Or ask if all be right  
From mirror after mirror,  
No vanity's displayed:  
I'm looking for the face I had  
Before the world was made.

What if I look upon a man  
As though on my beloved,  
And my blood be cold the while  
And my heart unmoved?  
Why should he think me cruel  
Or that he is betrayed?  
I'd have him love the thing that was  
Before the world was made.

(270-271 CP)

In another poem, “Before the World Was Made”, the female figure is using the beauty products in a superficial way without serious intention. The suppressed natural thoughts, actions, and feelings of the female have been expressed in her desire to be free and in her attempt to become a beautiful woman by using the beauty aids. However, as a woman she wishes to be admired and deeply loved for her spiritual, not for her physical beauty. The woman would always be ready to use the beauty products as she wants to be free and independent. For her, this is a way to protect her own voice and soul from being controlled by social and religious restrictions. The woman uses the beauty products just to search for her identity before the world was created. While the female is giving a glance to other men, she would like her beloved to focus on the essential side of her personality -the spiritual

beauty of her womanhood- which had existed before the world was made. (David A Ross, 291)

The poem reveals a young woman's sarcastic attitude toward the role assigned to her by the society she lives in. Her social and sexual violation of the established values and norms of the community is the outcome of her mockery and imitation. In this poem, the woman connects herself with the immortal beauty when she says "The face I had, / Before the world was made." This is the way she protests against the society, which criticizes her vanity, and against the lover, who feels sorry for her lack of feelings. The woman in this poem is going to have immortal beauty not as a woman who should take care of her physical appearance for her husband or lover. Instead, her efforts to improve her physical appearance artificially should be regarded as an attempt to achieve eternal beauty rather than as a reflection of personal vanity: As the woman points out, "No vanity's displayed: / I'm looking for the face I had, / before the world was made."(Marjorie Howes, 148).

In the following lines, the woman uses her union with the immortal beauty to protect herself from the accusation of her of being a hard-hearted woman:

What if I look upon a man  
As though on my beloved,  
And my blood be cold the while  
And my heart unmoved?  
Why should he think me cruel  
Or that he is betrayed?  
I'd have him love the thing that was  
Before the world was made.

(270-271 CP)

In these lines, the woman asks her beloved to look for immortal beauty in his earthly love for her. This implies that for her beloved her spiritual beauty is not so important as her physical existence. She demands that her physical beauty (which she calls a "thing") is not a replacement for her real spiritual and personal beauty, as clearly seen in the words, "Thing that was, /Before the world was made." In a sense, the woman protests against the established assumptions toward women in the society. So, she deliberately puts on an artificial mask of beauty to defend herself

against the prejudices in society that considers her merely a “thing”- a physical being. This means that she is regarded both as a material (like a sculpture or statue) to be shown to her lover and as a living entity who cannot be judged by the standards of individual responsibility, honesty and love. In fact, she is revolting against the society which demands that she become both a thing and a person (Marjorie Howes, 149).

Another poem, “A First Confession”, reflects Yeats’s concern over the unfortunate situation of Irish women who go to the public market to find partners for themselves. This is a tragic rather than a comic occasion. The poet sympathizes with Irish women who are forced to find out their partners among a crowd of unpleasant men. On the other hand, the poem deals with the theme of sexual desire as a powerful factor that drives women to compete with one another to find someone to marry (Marjorie Howes, 150).

I long for truth, and yet  
I cannot stay from that  
My better self disowns,  
For a man's attention  
Brings such satisfaction  
To the craving in my bones

(271 CP)

In these verses, the woman’s sexual yearning is the power that motivates her to go to the community’s public area, which has been established for women to find partners for themselves. The woman in this public area should pretend to be a flirting female. The female speaker’s attitude and her behavior have not been directed by her true desire or willingness. Rather, it is based on the dictates of the society which expects her to wear the mask of being a flirting, romantic woman in the public market. Actually, the female speaker is mocking women’s willingness to become competitors in the marriage market. The pursuit of perfection among women is due to their desire to attract men’s attention. In the poem, the line “My better self disowns” explains the female speaker’s refusal to participate in this market. Yet, her sexual desires drive her to go to the market. This part of the poem shows how powerful sexual desires can be in driving women to seek physical satisfaction as well

as how weak they can be in resisting the temptation to do so. The poem can be interpreted as a metaphor for the failure to resist the temptation of sexual desire, which results in the subordination of one's spiritual self. In fact, women's sexual impulses may prevent them from achieving a strong identity to become independent individuals who do not need the support and guidance of men. (Marjorie Howes, 150).

In David A. Ross's opinion, "A First Confession" is one of the poems that deal with the conflict between a woman's better self (spiritual self) women and her physical self, which drive her into satisfying her sexual desires. Ultimately, the woman is defeated in the battle against her physical drives, yielding to her instinctive desires as a flirting woman. The following lines of the poem reveal what happens to the woman in that public market (David Ross, 292):

Why those questioning eyes  
That are fixed upon me?  
What can they do but shun me  
If empty night replies?

(271 CP)

The woman has been driven by her desires to catch a man's recognition. Yet, she feels frustrated when she gets a response of dislike and dissatisfaction from the man looking at her. The woman feels utterly disappointed at being intentionally disregarded by the man whose attention she wanted to attract "What can they do but shun me, / If empty night replies?". The phrase "empty night" implies that the women will spend the whole night without a man noticing and observing her, or even taking care of her presence. However, her sexual desires will continue to exist even though she has not been able to find a marriage partner (Marjorie Howes, 150).

In the third stanza lies the mystery of the poem, which is suggested by Yeats's first note on the poem: "I have symbolised a woman's love as the struggle of the darkness to keep the sun from rising from its earthly bed." In the first line of the stanza, "Brightness that I pull back /From the Zodiac", the word Zodiac is associated with the symbol of the sun as a symbol of male qualities and behaviors (David Ross, 292). In Yeats's symbolic vision, the sun is usually considered to have an influence on thoughts and rationality (Umanath Kattel, 2). Hence, in the lines, "Why those

questioning eyes / That are fixed upon me?”, the “questioning eyes” refers to men’s ability to understand women’s fake and artful flirting manners. In the end, a man ignores a woman or approaches her cautiously as a result of the woman’s flirting manners. The society demands that women should seduce men by wearing the mask of coquetry. But, this mask conceals the woman’s true nature and prevents her from achieving independence from social patterns of behavior (David A. Ross, 292).

Viewed as a whole, the poem is about the conflict within the female speaker’s identity between her spiritual beauty as an independent woman having a sense of her identity on the one hand, and her bodily sexual desire that drives her away from her spiritual self on the other. The void of the darkness of the night is suggestive of the woman’s instinctual desires, her bodily appetite, which takes her far away from her true self (David A. Ross, 292).

### Her Triumph

I did the dragon's will until you came  
Because I had fancied love a casual  
Improvisation, or a settled game  
That followed if I let the kerchief fall:  
Those deeds were best that gave the minute wings  
And heavenly music if they gave it wit;  
And then you stood among the dragon-rings.  
I mocked, being crazy, but you mastered it  
And broke the chain and set my ankles free,  
Saint George or else a pagan Perseus;  
And now we stare astonished at the sea,  
And a miraculous strange bird shrieks at us.

(271 CP)

Another poem, “Her Triumph”, portrays a woman controlled by her physical nature, her coquetry -her desire to be an independent woman who can flirt as she wishes (David A. Ross, 292). However, this strong desire, described as a monster (Michael Edward Godfrey, 42), or as a (dragon) takes her away from her better, spiritual self (David A. Ross, 292). Basically, the poem builds around two main ideas: the beliefs and customs that restrain the fulfillment of female desire, which is

symbolized by the “dragon will”, and the idea that men play the role of liberating women from the constraints of these traditions. Unlike the previous poem, “A First Confession” in which the female speaker was flirting with her lover to capture his recognition, in “Her Triumph”, the male figure liberates his beloved from her role as an attractive and seductive woman, whose beauty may cause her suitor to get into dangerous situations, while rewarding her with a fruitful love relationship. In the poem, the traditional plot of female captive being rescued by a man is employed to criticize the conventional conception of femininity: the position of the coquette for whom love is “a casual improvisation, or a settled game.” (Marjorie Howes, 151).

The poem clearly concentrates on a woman’s liberation from social restrictions: “And broke the chain and set my ankles free”. Here, the word “chain” stands for the society as a powerful external force that imprisons and leads the woman to conceive of herself as a shallow being. The woman confesses that, at first, she mocked the rescuing lover, but then she found that the man “mastered it” (that is, he was able to set her free from the restrictions of social conventions). The strong love between the woman and her lover inspires him to liberate her and grant her freedom. After she is set free, the woman and her lover look at the sea, which is a symbol of energy, authority, and love (David A. Ross, 292). The act of setting the woman free from the slavery, brutality, and oppressive rules of society is actually not only a matter of liberating her mentally, but also one of offering her the freedom to make her own choices in life (Marjorie Howes, 151-152).

He Wishes For The Cloths Of Heaven

HAD I the heavens' embroidered cloths,  
Enwrought with golden and silver light,  
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths  
Of night and light and the half-light,  
I would spread the cloths under your feet:  
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;  
I have spread my dreams under your feet;  
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

(70 CW)

“He Wishes For The Cloths Of Heaven” takes as its theme the idea of unrequited love and the power of refusal that women enjoy over men in society. Women have a significant advantage over men since men cannot impose all their rules and demands on women. In the poem, the male speaker subordinates his own interests for the sake of the woman he is in love with. No matter how hard he tries to attain his beloved, the poet cannot make his dream come true, which causes him to be both terrified and frustrated. In the poem, Yeats is eager to win and take over “The heavens' embroidered cloths”, which he would decorate and fill with stars to make them more bright, shiny and beautiful. He wishes to make the heavens' cloths brighter just to lay them as a carpet for his beloved, whom he both loves and admires. According to David A. Ross, this poem presents an image of passion and deep feeling of love. Yeats speaks to Maud Gonne, complimenting her to win her approval and favor. In the poem, Yeats desires to lay under his beloved's feet the heaven's carpet, which has been ornamented by him in an extravagant manner. This fantastic carpet is described as follows (David A. Ross, 117-118):

Enwrought with golden and silver light,  
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths  
Of night and light and the half-light.

(70 CW)

Previously, the poet had promised to lay an extraordinarily beautiful carpet under her royal feet. This magnificent carpet is a symbol of Yeats' hope that Maud Gonne will accept his gift; this very poem (Vangoghfan, 1). However, while laying his dreams under his beloved's feet, the poet is afraid of being refused by her. This feeling is suggested by the poet's fear that she may carelessly step on the carpet (Marjorie Howes, John Kelly 174-175):

But I, being poor, have only my dreams;  
I have spread my dreams under your feet;  
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

(70 CW)

From these lines it is clear that Yeats risks being humiliated by submissively laying his dreams under her feet. Actually, this scene seems to be an allusion to Yeats's preoccupation with his frustrating experience with Maud Gonne, who refused him and chose another lover. (Marjorie Howes, John Kelly 174-175).

As Vangoghfan comments, Yeats is addressing Maud Gonne in the poem saying "I would spread the cloths under your feet." These words suggest that Maud Gonne has an impressive beauty that is worthy of being treated in an admirable way, worthy of praise, high respect and great esteem. Maud Gonne was a noble woman who deserved to be treated like a member of royalty. She impressed her lover with her charm and gentle manners. This is a declaration of Yeats's feelings for his beloved, Maud Gonne. For all his efforts, however, Yeats fails to win her heart. In the following lines, Yeats further demonstrates his romantic love for Maud Gonne all saying, "But I, being poor, have only my dreams; /I have spread my dreams under your feet." Yeats's imagination, fostered by his love and passion, is the single most asset that he possesses to win his beloved's heart. Despite his confession that he is a poor fellow, the poet's creative artistic power enables him to express his love for Maud Gonne with humility (Vangoghfan, 1).

#### Leda and the Swan

W. B. Yeats, 1865 - 1939

A sudden blow: the great wings beating still  
Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed  
By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,  
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.

How can those terrified vague fingers push  
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?  
And how can body, laid in that white rush,  
But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?

A shudder in the loins engenders there  
The broken wall, the burning roof and tower  
And Agamemnon dead.  
Being so caught up,  
So mastered by the brute blood of the air,  
Did she put on his knowledge with his power  
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?

(218-219 CW)

The teachings of the Catholic Church demand that women serve and submit themselves to their husbands and take care of their children at home. Commenting on Yeats's three poems "Adam's Curse", "A Prayer for my Daughter", "Leda and the Swan", Elizabeth Butler Cullingford states that women at that time were kept inside home, serving their husbands and siblings. They were always supposed to be beautiful and attractive since they were usually regarded as an enjoyment tool for the husband's sexual appetite (Marjorie Howes, John Kelly, 168). Below are several lines taken from various poems, in which Yeats criticizes the common assumptions regarding women's position in society:

To be born woman is to know, / Although they do not talk  
of it at school, / That we must labour to be beautiful."

(Taken from "Adam's Curse")

O may she live like some green laurel, / Rooted in one  
dear perpetual place." (Taken from "A Prayer for my  
Daughter")

How can those terrified vague fingers push, / The  
feathered glory from her loosening thighs?" (Taken from  
"Leda and the Swan").

(218-219 CW)

From the lines above, one can infer that women in Irish society were being considered to be inferior to men. They were deprived of the opportunity to achieve their freedom from the domination of their husbands. Yeats was bitterly aware and strongly critical of the gender discrimination that women were subjected to in a society dominated by patriarchal values (Marjorie Howes, John Kelly, 168).

In "Leda and the Swan", Yeats reveals that the rules of the Catholic Church prevented women from being free and separating from her husband. In Irish society, women did not have the right to prevent pregnancy by taking medicine, or undergoing surgical operations, or other through other means. In other words, the rules of the Free State did not allow women to practice birth control methods. Conversely, these laws ordered women to be submissive to their husbands by presenting nuns as a role model for them. Being a Protestant, Yeats set himself firmly against the restrictive laws of the Catholic Church, openly declaring his preference of women's side and advocating their rights of divorce, as well as their right to be treated as equals to men (Marjorie Howes, John Kelly, 179).

The rules of the Catholic Church are based on the idea that women would lose all their power in the society if they were granted the rights of divorce and birth control. In other words, these rights would work to women's disadvantage, causing them to become insecure and vulnerable. Hence, it is better for women to spend their lives with a husband than to insist on becoming fully independent in making decisions. However, the rules of the Free State lose sight of the fact that such an attitude means reducing women to the position of sex objects used to fulfill men's sensual desires, as aptly suggested by Yeats's phrase "loosening thighs" (Marjorie Howes, John Kelly, 179).

Another poem by Yeats, "Leda and the Swan", takes as its theme the violation of a woman. In the poem, Yeats portrays a woman who is both despised and physically abused by her husband. This sonnet actually presents a woman considered unworthy and bitterly scorned by her husband, who seems to be sexually dissatisfied. The woman is unable to defend herself against "the brute blood" of her husband, who forces her to have sexual intercourse against her will (Marjorie Howes, John Kelly, 178-179).

Yeats interprets the image of the swan (the husband) as a bird flying high above the ground and is therefore superior to all the creatures on the ground. In other

words, the swan is always stronger than a human being. Yet, the swan looks soft and mild, which enables him to conceal his brutal nature so that he can achieve his goal. Yeats makes a clear distinction between birds as subjective creatures and humans as objective beings. As the poet points out, "Certain birds, especially as I see things, such lonely birds as the heron, hawk, eagle, and swan, are the natural symbols of subjectivity, especially when floating upon the wind alone or alighting upon some pool or river, while the beasts that run upon the ground, especially those that run in packs, are the natural symbols of objective man." (David A. Ross, 141).

In "Leda and the Swan", the reader can recognize the image of a girl who, under the authority and control of a man, is denied the right to be considered a human being. This vision of a girl humiliated by a man virtually marks the end of her existence as a human being, since the girl has lost all her hopes that she could ever become equal to man. The phrase "the staggering girl" implies that this woman has been deeply shocked by the absolute authority of her deceitful husband, as implied by the "swan" image. She has been severely harmed by the savage violation and cruelty of her husband, who has forced her into a sexual intercourse against her will. The woman's feeling of shock is a sign of her refusal to be merely a sex tool for her husband's masculine power over her. Here, the word "caressed" suggests a lovely and gentle touch by her husband. Soon, it becomes clear that the first impression one gets from the man's approach to his wife is merely a deceit. The poet describes the man's behavior with the phrase "vague fingers push" and the woman's response with the words "her loosening thighs." This implies that, though initially frightened and shocked by the man's physical touch, the woman's later response to this behavior turns out to be one of relief, as suggested by her failure to show any resistance against the male power. It seems like the woman enjoys the foreplay that occurs before the intercourse, feeling sexually aroused, just like her husband (Marjorie Howes, Johan Kelly, 180).

In the last line of "Leda and the Swan" Yeats offers a definition of the "indifferent beak", which suggests that the woman is controlled by her abusive husband; exploited, and degraded to the level of being a sexual tool for her husband. As soon as he finds sexual gratification, the man wants to get rid of his wife, feeling no desire to be with her (Marjorie Howes, Johan Kelly, 181). At the end of the poem, the word "knowledge" suggests that during this sexual experience, the woman

feels not only “overpowered”, but also “empowered” by her knowledge of her power to shape the course of future events (Marjorie Howes, John Kelly, 181).

“Leda and the Swan”, Leda represents the Irish woman while the swan stands for the Irish man. In the poem, Yeats presents the violent bodily desires and the catastrophic effects that they can have on a woman’s life. Leda is brutally treated by the swan, which produces in the victim a strong feeling of fear; whereas in “Helen of Troy”, Helen is portrayed as an idealized figure who has gained an important position in society due to her achievements and her rebellious spirit. Here, Yeats uses Helen as a symbol of his beloved Maud Gonne (David A. Ross, 141). It is not a coincidence that another poem by Yeats, “Helen of Troy”, involves the image of a strong woman capable of controlling her life, resolutely struggling to achieve an equal status with men (Marjorie Howes, Johan Kelly, 181).

The brutal behavior of the swan is preceded by a desire to have immediate physical contact disguised by a soft and gentle attitude meant to deceive Leda. Eventually, the swan’s violent treatment of Leda reveals his ulterior motive: to take advantage of Leda for sexual satisfaction. In the poem, Yeats depicts the movement of the swan’s body toward Leda in a chaotic, noisy disturbance and the violent action against Leda’s body. As the swan gets closer to Leda, he positions himself to control her with a subtle manipulation, a cunning tactic to gain control over Leda. The swan forces Leda into a sexual intercourse, turning into a wild and uncontrollable animal full of passion and lust. Leda desperately struggles with the swan, trying to set herself free from the brutal attack of this swan. Once the swan achieves full control over Leda and finds sexual satisfaction, he uncovers his true identity is revealed. Zeus, disguised as a swan, has shown his complete power and authority over Leda (David A. Ross, 141-142).

Yeats’s point of view in interiorizing chaos of the swan in the poem of “Leda and the Swan” presents Zeus pretending to be a creature, the swan, only to commit a crime of forcing Leda to submit to sexual intercourse. During this savage action of the swan one can notice that Leda is unaware of the present danger of such an act because of the deceitful image of Zeus as a swan. This image means the softness, gentleness, kindness that would tempt a woman and then force her to do an

unwelcomed action. Leda is frightened and horrified by the swan, on the other hand, his action caused damage to Leda that it no longer can be repaired or treated. The swan had inner-true violent desires to indecently abuse Leda (W. B. Yeats: Interiorizing The Chaos, 191).

Leda gets deeply shocked against the swan's harassment, because of her recognition that man's physical existence is governed not by standards of ethics and refined behavior, but by impulses and instinctive desires. Man's physical nature is governed not by nobleness, serenity, or peacefulness, but by an extreme potential for aggression and violence, which are the outcome of man's instincts. Accordingly, urged by an impulse to satisfy his sexual desires, the Swan approaches Leda, intimidates, harasses, and finally rapes her (David A. Ross, 142).

Leda's reaction against the swan's desires and action is due to the fact it is an action regarded as morally and legally wrong. The swan's gentle touch at the beginning is followed by a brutal action which causes Leda to outrageously defend herself as she is in extreme fear. As the swan approaches Leda affectionately, the latter trembles and loses control, finally surrendering to the swan's desires. Leda admits the fact that the Swan has seduced her: "And how can body, laid in that white rush, / But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?" As the Swan attempts to satisfy his desires, his heart starts beating fast. Here, the "beating heart" seems to suggest that once the inner-spiritual beauty of any human being becomes intertwined with this physical world, the desires of this physical world tend to dominate the spiritual desires of the human being. Consequently, the inner-true self is corrupted by the physical world, suggested by the image of body of the Swan lying over Leda, as Yeats once remarked, "Natural and supernatural with the self-same ring are wed." (David A. Ross, 142).

Yeats concentrates on the physical aspects of this bird "The beating wings, the dark webbed feet, the long neck and beak" and in all of these portraits of the swan predicts the brutal and aggressive action of the swan caused by its inner-true self that is the desires and reality of the swan or man (W. B. Yeats: Interiorizing The Chaos, 191).

The poem ends with the following lines "Did she put on his knowledge with his power, / Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?" These lines clearly symbolize a man who stands against women's rights. In the absence of men's

kindness and nobleness, the power of the mind to control and motivate the body is overthrown by the power of physical desires which become the motivators of emotions in men (David A. Ross, 142).

Yeats declared that the power and authority which makes a man act in a brutal and cruel way is not influenced and governed by human being feeling and emotion, or even based on the grounds of acting according to a man's legal and moral bond with a woman, but by the violent physical action driven by the inner instinct. This inner –instinct is revealed in the man's actions as aggression and intimidation toward women especially in the period of time in Ireland when the dominance over and suppression of women were allowed by the unfair Catholic Church laws (David A. Ross, 142).

In the last stanza of the poem, the line “And Agamemnon dead” reveals that the poem involves a remarkable reference to Greek mythology. Within this context, Jamie Cisco points out that this poem brings to mind the story of Zeus who disguises himself as a swan and rapes Leda. Then she lays an egg and gives birth to Helen and her identical bothers Castor and Polydeuces. Helen was the fruit of this unpleasant action who as Yeats mentioned in the last lines of the poem caused the massive destruction of Troy “The broken wall, the burning roof and tower, /And Agamemnon dead” (W. B. Yeats: Interiorizing The Chaos, 191).

They have a sister named Clytemnestra from their mother's first husband Tyndareus. After Helen is kidnapped by Paris and taken to Troy, all men of the Greek monarchy decide to fight and are governed by the leadership of Agamemnon. They all decide with Agamemnon to get Helen back to her husband Menelaus. The war lasts for ten years during which Troy is destroyed, and then Helen is saved and returns to Greece. When Clytemnestra learns that her husband, Agamemnon, has offered his daughter for the sake of winning in one of his battles, she and her lover decide to sentence Agamemnon to death to take revenge on him for her daughter's death once he returns from the battle to Greece. After murdering Agamemnon, Clytemnestra and her lover are murdered by her daughter and son, Helen and her two identical bothers are the only people who have a high ranking position. Their high ranking position give them the shiny Celestial body and that image ends man's dominance over women and women start to fight and demand their rights in the modern world (<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/l/leda.html>).

In the last stanza, it is stated that Helen and Clytemnestra provoked Greece against Troy and caused the destruction of the whole city: “The broken wall, the burning roof and tower, /And Agamemnon dead.” It is also pointed out that the murder of Agamemnon by his wife predicted the future - the end of the dominance of male power and the beginning of the struggle for women’s rights, as well as women demand for holding high positions in society (<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/l/leda.html>).



## CHAPTER III

### YEATS'S ENCHAENTMENT WITH THE ROSE IN HIS POETIC VISION

Yeats moves from the image of women as people who desire to be free and independent to another vision of women as roses. First, it is important to clarify the meaning of rose as a symbol of women in Yeats's poetry. Frank Hughes Murphy selects seventeen symbolic uses of the rose based on Yeats's vision, or on the views of the critics who commented on Yeats's poetry. It has been found that in Yeats's poetic vision rose stands for a wide range of ideas such as. . .

spiritual love; eternal beauty; woman's beauty; a compound of beauty and peace; a compound of beauty and wisdom; Shelley's intellectual beauty, altered to sympathize with human suffering; physical love; Ireland; religion, Maud Gonne; the sun; the divine nature, the flower of the virgin; Apuleius's flower; the female impulse toward life (as opposed to the male impulse toward death [symbolized by the lily]); the female generative organs; a key Rosicrucian symbol.

(Qtd. In Peter Alderson Smith 175-176)

Among these diverse ways of using the rose as a symbol, readers can observe three symbolic uses of the rose: as an image that represents woman's beauty, Maud Gonne, and Ireland. The perfect spiritual beauty of the three symbols (woman's beauty, Maud Gonne, and Ireland) has been always sought after by man (Peter Alderson Smith, 177). By using the rose as a multiple symbol for woman's beauty, Maude Gonne, and Ireland at the same time, Yeats was actually revealing two things: his strong feelings of affection for Maud Gonne as a beautiful woman, and his deep passion and love for Ireland. In fact, Maud Gonne and Ireland were identical for

Yeats. The connection between the rose as a national image that stands for Ireland, and the rose as a symbol representing a beautiful and ideal woman strongly reveals the poet's never-ending hope that his country will be liberated from all the restrictions imposed upon her (Unterecker 77-78).

Basically, the rose is a symbol of ideal woman. Maud's relationship with the rose can be compared to the relationship between the lady of the Medieval poets of courtly love and Virgin Mary, whose perfection has been represented in the visual arts, poetry, and music. This concrete image of beauty has inspired poets to meditate on ideal beauty. At the same time, the rose represents the archetype of physical beauty. Often the rose is used as a symbol of woman's physical and spiritual existence. The rose is usually associated with what lies in the heart, one's deepest feelings (Peter Alderson Smith, 177). Traditionally, rose has often been used by poets as a symbol to invoke their sweethearts and to express their strong feelings for them. In addition, rose is usually regarded as a symbol of magnificence, elegance, and spiritual majesty, as well as an image that represents feministic ideals such as women's liberation and the right to be on equal terms with men (Kawther M Al-zwelef 236-237).

In "The Secret Rose" the stars are depicted as "Blown about the sky, / Like the sparks blown out of smithy, and die". The line seems to be an inhibited allusion to revolution, an idea that is reiterated in the last two lines of the poem: "Surely thine hour has come, thy great wind blows, / Far- off, most secret, and inviolate Rose?" (69-70 CP). The image of rose in Yeats's poetry is a symbol the desire to see Ireland (portrayed as a beautiful, attractive woman) as an independent nation. In other words, the rose is associated with patriotic feelings, a strong hope that the days when Ireland will become liberated are not far ahead (Marjorie Howes, John Kelly 171).

In "The Secret Rose", Yeats emphasizes the spiritual and mystical beauty of the rose as an image suggestive of "transcendence". The poet considers the rose as a spiritual entity, as a means to step beyond the physical world (David A. Ross, 222). With the image of rose, Yeats emphasizes the transience of all earthly things (including earthly beauty) because they are far from being perfect. It seems that he has no hope left to unify the ideal and the real. With regard to the point under

discussion, Kawther Mahdi Al-Zewelf, a distinguished scholar writing on Yeats, points out that in literary works the rose is often regarded as a perfect symbol of beauty and integrity; hence, it is closely associated with spirituality and mysticism. To quote Al-Zewelf, “This popular flower has a complicated symbology with paradoxical meanings. It is at once a symbol of both purity and passion; both heavenly perfection and earthly desire; both virginity and fertility; both death and life” (Kawther M Al-zwelef, 233-234).

With Yeats, rose gains a spiritual significance -he is fascinated with the spiritual beauty of the rose, which leads him to associate the rose with the “world soul”. In “The Secret Rose”, the poet addresses the rose as an extraordinary, free-spirited woman, a “universal inspiration Muse”, and as an image who represents all women in the world (Kawther M Al-zwelef, 236-237).

Another poem, “The Rose of Peace”, takes as its theme the union between the spiritual and physical world; represented by the symbol of rose, which Yeats hoped would grow. To start with, the poem opens with the word “if”, which implies that the rose is just a dream. The rose, which combines the two worlds –the spiritual and the temporal- is represented as the beloved Maud Gonne. Maud Gonne in Yeats’s poetry represents the Rose in her spiritual and physical beauty. Traditionally, it is assumed that this flower will bring peace and freedom to this earth. She is sacred in her physical and spiritual beauty, which will help join her with the voices of women’s souls in heaven and the voice of other women’s souls on earth. Together they will achieve the union of the two worlds -the temporary physical and spiritual (Alana White, 40). Here, it is important to note that when Yeats wrote this poem, he wanted to celebrate and express his admiration for Maud Gonne’s beauty embodied in the image of the beautiful rose. Yeats declared that this Rose remained only a wish and an impossible dream since the poem started with the word “if” (Unterecker, 79)

Yeats wishes that the rose would be calm, quiet, and no longer fight for her rights. Women’s rights could best be achieved through the union of this temporary world with the eternal world of souls. This united world can be seen in the first part of the poem (Alana White, 40):

IF Michael, leader of God's host  
When Heaven and Hell are met,  
Looked down on you from Heaven's door-post  
He would his deeds forget.  
In his divine homestead,  
He would go weave out of the stars  
A chaplet for your head.  
And all folk seeing him bow down,  
And white stars tell your praise,  
Would come at last to God's great town,  
Led on by gentle ways;  
And God would bid His warfare cease,  
Saying all things were well;  
And softly make a rosy peace,  
A peace of Heaven with Hell.

(36-37 CP)

Here, Yeats suggests that if this connection is established between the two worlds, Michael, the archangel, would stop worrying about the wars that may break out on the earth. The angel would then spend most of his time making a garland filled with precious stones shining like stars in the sky to crown Maud Gonne's beauty (Alana White, 40).. Maud Gonne is so pretty that, Michael would quit fighting in the battle to praise her beauty in peace (Galawezh, 277). Ultimately, her beauty, praised by white stars, would become instrumental in uniting the two worlds- the spiritual and the physical. And, Yeats concludes his poem saying that in the end God, having created perfect beauty in the image of woman, will bring peace to the world through His will and power, and thus terminating the war between heaven (the spiritual world) and hell (the physical world). In the poem, it is clear that Yeats associates eternal beauty with the image of sensuous woman. The exceptional power of the rose of peace lies in the idea that she is an embodiment of the sacred and the sensual alike; and hence capable of uniting the eternal and the physical. The beauty of the rose would last forever because of its ability to do so. (Alana White, 40)

Another poem, "To Ireland in the Coming Times", reflects Yeats's preoccupation with the notion of harmony between the physical world on earth and the sacred world of heaven, represented by the image universal woman (Alana White, 45):

Know, that I would accounted be  
True brother of a company  
That sang, to sweeten Ireland's wrong,  
Ballad and story, rann and song;  
Nor be I any less of them,  
Because the red-rose-bordered hem  
Of her, whose history began  
Before God made the angelic clan,  
Trails all about the written page.  
When Time began to rant and rage  
The measure of her flying feet  
Made Ireland's heart begin to beat;  
And Time bade all his candles flare  
To light a measure here and there;  
And may the thoughts of Ireland brood  
Upon a measured quietude.

Nor may I less be counted one  
With Davis, Mangan, Ferguson,  
Because, to him who ponders well,  
My rhymes more than their rhyming tell  
Of things discovered in the deep,  
Where only body's laid asleep.  
For the elemental creatures go  
About my table to and fro,  
That hurry from unmeasured mind  
To rant and rage in flood and wind;  
Yet he who treads in measured ways

May surely barter gaze for gaze.  
Man ever journeys on with them  
After the red-rose-bordered hem.  
Ah, faeries, dancing under the moon,  
A Druid land, a Druid tune!

While still I may, I write for you  
The love I lived, the dream I knew.  
From our birthday, until we die,  
Is but the winking of an eye;  
And we, our singing and our love,  
What measurer Time has lit above,  
And all benighted things that go  
About my table to and fro,  
Are passing on to where may be,  
In truth's consuming ecstasy,  
No place for love and dream at all;  
For God goes by with white footfall.  
I cast my heart into my rhymes,  
That you, in the dim coming times,  
May know how my heart went with them  
After the red-rose-bordered hem.

(50-55 CP)

In the poem, the rose has a double meaning; it symbolizes the poet's devotion to Ireland and his love of Maud Gonne. Yeats's love, loyalty, and enthusiasm for Maud Gonne and Ireland are identical; in fact, he believes that both are equally significant and valuable to him and his poetry. The idea that God created woman before He created "the angelic clan" (Ireland) bears testimony to the close connection between the image of woman and Ireland. Also, Yeats's statement that when Time began it was woman's dancing feet that "Made Ireland's heart begin to beat" is suggestive of the idea that the world was created to honor woman. So, once again, the rose becomes a symbol of the poet's universal sensuousness, embodied in the image of woman as at once a sensuous and sacred being (Alana White, 46). The

poem reveals how deeply Yeats was fascinated by the everlasting beauty of the rose, which is depicted as an image that has both physical and spiritual value (David A. Ross, 255). The image of the beautiful rose stands for her physical and spiritual beauty (Unterecker, 77-78). The poem can be read in two ways: as a love poem or a nationalist poem. In the second stanza of the poem, Yeats draws an analogy between Ireland and a defenseless woman. Actually, he associates Ireland with a female lover. The word “hem” calls attention to the femininity of Ireland (Lenka, 40).

The poem reflects Yeats’s deep emotions toward his beloved Maud Gonne and his patriotic feelings for Ireland. (David A. Ross, 255). In the first line of the third stanza, Yeats’s promise to his lover is a romantic way of expressing his desire to support and fight for Ireland. Yeats’s nationalistic feelings motivate him to write and sing for Ireland, which is depicted as a free, independent, and as a beautiful country. Yeats in his poetry is not only singing for the beautiful scenery of Ireland’s landscape, but at the same time for the everlasting truth the rose Maud Gonne represents. In Yeats’s poetic vision, Maud Gonne, symbolized by the image of “the red-rose-bordered hem”, is identical to Ireland. Yeats’s rose symbolizes his passion for Maud Gonne, revealed in the phrase “The love I lived”, while his wishes for the image of Ireland as an independent country, and is suggested by the phrase “The dream I knew” (Unterecker, 77-78).

Another poem, “The Lover Tells of the Rose of His Heart” centers on the discrepancy between the ideal and the real rose, presented in two separate stanzas.

ALL things uncomely and broken, all things worn out and  
old,  
The cry of a child by the roadway, the creak of a lumbering  
cart,  
The heavy steps of the ploughman, splashing the wintry  
mould,  
Are wronging your image that blossoms a rose in the  
deeps of my heart.

The wrong of unshapely things is a wrong too great to be

told;

I hunger to build them anew and sit on a green knoll apart,  
With the earth and the sky and the water, re-made, like a  
casket of gold

For my dreams of your image that blossoms a rose in the  
deeps of my heart.

(56 CP)

In “The Lover Tells of the Rose of His Heart”, the hopeful tone of the previous poems has been replaced with a melancholy and doubtful tone. Unlike his other poems, this poem is dominated by a sense of pessimism arising from the poet’s recognition that the outside world is not compatible with his optimistic vision (Alana White, 49). He attempts to get away from the unpleasant reality by engaging himself in his romantic fantasy of the rose of his heart (Alana White, 49). In the poem, Yeats expresses his wish that his beloved Maud Gonne would give up engaging in political activities and accept his idea of leading a quieter life together with him (Alana White, 49).

In the first stanza, Yeats rejects everything that looks unattractive and poses a threat to the image of Maud Gonne in his heart, as suggested by the lines “ALL things uncomely and broken”. Among them are “the cry of a child by the roadway, the creak of a lumbering cart,” and “the heavy steps of the ploughman” (David Ross, 146). Urged by a desire to escape from the anxieties of real life, Yeats wishes that he could live a quiet life in the countryside. Through his power of imagination, the poet wants to take refuge in a silent setting where he can find relief from the distractions of the outside world and peacefully dream about his beloved. However, the reality of his suffering is so agonizing that he can’t sustain these pleasant thoughts and feelings for a long time. Yeats’s pain proves so compelling that it drives him to express his sadness and depression due caused by the discrepancy between the real rose in the world and the rose of his imagination. It is obvious that the reality of the rose in the world outside leads him to suffer because this rose was not in harmony with the ideal rose of his imagination. It is ironic that the image of the rose created in Yeats’s imagination has been disrupted by the bitter reality of the rose in the outside world. The harsh reality of the rose in the physical world compels Yeats to acknowledge

that the rose of his imagination -symbolizing his beloved, Maud Gonne- is bound to remain a dream that can never be attained.

Another way of interpreting the poem is to consider Yeats's archetypal vision of his beloved to be a mirror image of his aspiration to praise his idea of Maud Gonne as an ideal image of beauty, rather than present her beloved as a part and parcel of real life. In other words, a woman deserves praise not for her engagement in public affairs, but rather for her grace and beauty which make her worthy of love. Yeats's admiration appears mostly in his love by which he honors and appreciates his beloved. However, it is not so easy for the poet to describe the ideal image of his beloved, since it is not a concrete object that can be touched and seen. It is evident that Yeats experiences distress and agony when trying to depict his vision of the ideal woman. He feels oppressed by the material world, which interferes with his imagination and creativity. The poet considers anything associated with the real world to be inferior to his vision of the ideal woman in a Platonic sense. Feeling that the trivial events of everyday life are "wrong", Yeats attempts to refashion them. Ultimately, however, he suffers since, no matter how hard he tries, these trivial things interfere with his efforts to create this ideal image (Ryuji Ishikawa, 11, 12, 13).

However, his dreams fade away slowly, and his determination to cherish the ideal rose in his heart remains unshaken, as suggested by the last line of the first stanza, "your image that blossoms a rose in the deeps of my heart." The image of Maud Gonne represented by the symbol of the ideal of rose has been so deeply imprinted in his imagination that Yeats will always be inspired by this rose and will cherish her as the epitome of an ideal woman (Alana White, 50).

In the second stanza of the poem, Yeats tells us about his desire to remove everything unattractive from the world and redesign it as a "casket of gold" in which he can cherish dreams of Maud Gonne's image (David Ross, 146). On the other hand, Yeats realizes that it is impossible to remain detached from the rose of the real world, with its earth, sky, and water. It is evident that the image of the ideal rose symbolizing Maud Gonne has become less visible in his imagination. In fact, the phrase "your image" in the first stanza turns into "my dreams of your image" in the second stanza, which shows that the image of his beloved has become more and more obscure in the poet's imagination. In the poem, the first reference to the rose

image is suggestive of the poets's determination to reject the reality while the second reference to the rose reveals that his resolve to do so has weakened. All the same, he has not totally given up entertaining dreams about the ideal rose of his imagination (Alana White, 50). Yeats bitterly realizes that he has to get away from the reality and take refuge in the deeps of his own heart, giving free rein to his love. (Ryuji Ishikawa, 11, 12, 13).

#### To the Rose upon the Rood of Time

Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days!

Come near me, while I sing the ancient ways:

Cuchulain battling with the bitter tide;

The Druid, grey, wood-nurtured, quiet-eyed,

Who cast round Fergus dreams, and ruin untold;

And thine own sadness, whereof stars, grown old

In dancing silver-sandalled on the sea,

Sing in their high and lonely melody.

Come near, that no more blinded by man's fate,

I find under the boughs of love and hate,

In all poor foolish things that live a day,

Eternal beauty wandering on her way.

Come near, come near, come near—Ah, leave me still

A little space for the rose-breath to fill!

Lest I no more hear common things that crave;

The weak worm hiding down in its small cave,

The field-mouse running by me in the grass,

And heavy mortal hopes that toil and pass;

But seek alone to hear the strange things said

By God to the bright hearts of those long dead,

And learn to chaunt a tongue men do not know.

Come near; I would, before my time to go,

Sing of old Eire and the ancient ways:

Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days.

(31-32 CP)

In another poem, “To the Rose Upon the Rood of Time”, the rose becomes a symbol of perfection, harmony and eternal beauty (Sebastien, 4), reflected in the physical and spiritual beauty of art, nature, and woman (Ewha Chung, 226). Yeats presents the rose as a living plant filled with life and passion as well as a magical power. The rose in is associated with the everlasting existence of the spiritual beauty of women, which can never be dissociated from the physical world (Ewha Chung, 226). In the poem, Yeats wants to preserve the balance between the ideal rose of his heart, and the real rose suffering from the traditions and religious restrictions of Ireland (Ewha Chung, 238).

In this poem, Yeats attempts to achieve a harmony between two worlds that appear to be irreconcilable: the physical and the spiritual. The main idea of the poem is that one should not sacrifice body for the sake of soul. While on the one hand Yeats wants to contribute to Irish society with his creativity and imagination, on the other hand he voices his desire to become isolated from ordinary existence and to gain access to the mystical beauty of the eternal world. In fact, the poet intends to resolve the conflict between the need to become involved in worldly matters and the desire to attain mystical wisdom (Ewha Chung, 223,226).

The first lines of the poem: “Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days! /Come near me, while I sing the ancient ways” suggest that Yeats is calling on the rose of his heart to inspire him to write his poem. He sings ancient folklore songs to the rose with the hope that he will become more optimistic, active and self-confident (Ewha Chung, 227).The poet wants the rose to help him find eternal beauty in life. As with the Courtly Love tradition, Yeats idealizes her beloved, praises her beauty, and tries to win her favor (Galawezh, 277). The erotic connotations of the poem can be clearly seen in the way the poet desires that his beloved, Maud Gonne, come closer to him. In fact, the phrase “Come near” is repeated six times in the poem, which is suggestive of his search for sexual satisfaction. Though it is possible to have physical satisfaction through orgasm to some extent, the desire to achieve spiritual union with the beloved is an ideal bound to remain forever unfulfilled (Sebastien, 5).

As the closing lines of the first stanza suggest, the poet tries to achieve a reconciliation between the two roses, with the hope that he can find “in all poor foolish things that live a day / Eternal beauty wandering on her way” (Ewha Chung, 238).



## CHAPTER IV

### MAUD GONNE AS AN IMAGE OF BEAUTY EMBODIED IN VISIONS OF IRISH AND GREEK GODDESSES

As a prominent image in Yeats's poetry, Helen represents Maude Gonne in particular, and all women at large. Basically, there are three reasons why Yeats chose the image of Helen in his poetry. First of all, Yeats was deeply inspired by the pre-Raphaelite portraits of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Burne-Jones, in which women were described as beautiful beings who symbolized the union of the sensual and the spiritual, and whose beauty would endure forever. As a matter of fact when Yeats was 16, he became familiar with Rossetti's poems and paintings, which seems to have had a profound influence on his poetic vision, making him "in all things pre-Raphaelite". Taking Rossetti as a model, Yeats adopted an image of woman as a female priest, sibyl (an oracle), and a muse (Comak, 14-15). As Yeats himself put it in his *Autobiographies*, "Woman herself was still in our eyes.... romantic and mysterious, still the priestess of her shrine, our emotions remembering the *Lilith* and the *Sibylla* palmifera of Rossetti along with Johnson's favorite phrase, that life is a ritual, expressed something that was in some degree in all our thoughts, how could life be a ritual if woman had not her symbolic place?"(Yeats, *The Autobiography*, 203).

The second major influence on Yeats was that of the Decadent writers who became popular at the end of the 19th century with their image of femme fatal (which means an attractive and a seductive woman, especially the one who will ultimately cause extreme pain, sorrow, and anxiety to a man who would be involved with her). The image of femme fatal represented by Helen of Troy is based on a decadent idea which attempts to reconcile the opposed concepts such as love and death, beauty and destruction. The Decadent writers were fond of depicting the sensual women of the past, "the Fatal Woman who was successfully incarnated in all

ages and all lands; an archetype which tied in itself all forms of seduction, vices and delights.” (Comak, 15-16).

Another reason why Yeats chose Helen of Troy as an archetype of women could be found in the poetic tradition of associating Irish folklore with Greek mythology. Yeats’s interest in the image of Helen of Troy can be clearly seen in Lady Gregory’s commentary on Raftery, a poet who seems to have had a tremendous influence on Yeats:

The ideal country girl, with her dew-gray eye and long amber hair, is always likened to Venus, to Juno, to Deirdre. “I think she is nine times nicer than Deirdre” says Raftery, “or I may say Helen, the affliction of the Greeks”; and he writes of another country girl, that she is beyond Venus, in spite of all what Homer wrote on her appearance and Cassandra also, and for that bewitched Mars; beyond Minerva, and Juno, the king’s wife.

(Comak, 17)

As Frazier puts it, “Yeats was caught up, by his own account, in a style of heterosexual love inherited from the Romantics – a sort of doomed devotion to the muse, embodied in an unattainable woman.” Yeats seems to be so singularly obsessed with his beloved that he cannot enjoy peace of mind throughout his life (Adrian Frazier, 29).

Yeats is hopelessly devoted to an “unattainable” woman (Maud Gonne) whom he compares to Helen, a tragic character in ‘No Second Troy’ (Caroline Magennis, 11):

Why, what could she have done, being what she is?

Was there another Troy for her to burn?

(89-90 CW)

In “No Second Troy”, Maud Gonne is described as a woman who has the same characteristics as Helen of Troy. At this point, it would be worthwhile to consider some of the historical facts lying in the background of the poem, which was written in December, 1908. First and foremost, the image of Helen in the poem, which stands for Maud Gonne, represents the dynamic woman who was deprived of

the opportunity to use her energy for becoming involved in political affairs and pursuing revolutionary goals. At that time, the society admitted the presence of the exceptional woman, but it did not allow her to express her political views and to take political action. Consequently, this situation led the woman to feel frustrated, turning her into a destructive force (Marjorie Howes, John Kelly 177).

In “No Second Troy” (1908), Yeats decided to present Maud Gonne, a nationalistic woman, as an embodiment of immortal charming beauty. According to David Ross, Maud Gonne is a beautiful lady who feels strongly about women’s rights and their power to achieve independence (David A Ross, 10, 17). This poem honored and praised Maud Gonne as a phenomenal woman whose charming beauty is eternal. Yeats depicted the struggle of non-conformist women who refused to act in accordance with the norms of the mainstream. Those women opposed the government and protested against all the restrictive rules that were imposed on them. In the poem, Yeats calls attention to the way active women struggle with the dominant forces in society (Marjorie Howes, John Kelly 175-176):

Why should I blame her that she filled my days  
With misery, or that she would of late  
Have taught to ignorant men most violent ways,  
Or hurled the little streets upon the great,  
Had they but courage equal to desire? (89-90 CW)

Although Maud Gonne makes her lover suffer continuously, the poet does not blame his beloved for her behavior. Her noble character and her heroic actions are a sufficient justification for him to consider her to be free from all guilt and blame (Eunice Slinn, 58). Actually, the age in which she lives is to blame for it: The present age is not so noble and heroic as the past (Mariese Ribas Stankiewicz, 77). As Richard Ellmann says, “The guilt of [Gonne’s] actions is showered on her age. The poet attacks the Troy-less present for not being heroically inflammable.” (Richard Ellmann, 112).

The first line of the above extract from the poem reveals that Yeats has been rejected by his beloved, but he cannot blame her for it. There is some justification for Maud Gonne’s response to him in the idea that, in Irish society, women were not

allowed to voice their opinions, display their energy and participate in organizations to speak on behalf of other women. As a matter of fact, Yeats recognizes Maud Gonne as a dynamic woman who goes against the mainstream with determination and courage. Yet, anyone acting that way is doomed to remain alone (Marjorie Howes, John Kelly 176):

What could have made her peaceful with a mind  
That nobleness made simple as a fire,  
With beauty like a tightened bow, a kind.

(89-90 CW)

Yeats feels subordinate to Helen, who gains a strong and complete authority over the poet by attaining a higher level. She appears to be quite different from the typical image of woman: she is aggressive, rough, brave, honorable, passionate, and unyielding. Yeats uses the image of “a tightened bow” to represent Helen’s beauty which she uses as a weapon rather than as a means to attract men (Marjorie Howes, John Kelly 176).

The image of “tightened bow” suggests Maud Gonne’s beauty, power, her restrained passion, her patriotic feelings and attitudes, as well as her destructive power. Thus, she is admired not only for her courage and outstanding nobility, but also for her ability to bravely defend women’s rights and to drive other women in her country to take action (David A Ross, 10, 17).

Yeats converts the image of Helen who figured in Homer’s epic as a submissive and attractive woman for whom men would fight with each other, into a strong woman who has turned out to be a warrior herself. This female fighter is described as a “bow”, which is an allusion to any member of a legendary race of female fighters depicted in Greek mythology as tall, strong, and athletic women who lived in Scythia (Marjorie Howes, John Kelly 176). Maud Gonne’s beauty, which is reminiscent of a former era, “is not natural in an age like this, / Being high and solitary and most stern?” (Eunice Slinn, 58). Here, the word “natural” could be interpreted as a play on words that suggests the heroine’s unkind manners. In fact, “this Amazonian beauty”, which has connotations of a tall, manly, athletic, muscular and aggressive woman, has never responded positively to the poet’s feelings (Eunice Slinn, 58).

According to David Ross, Maud Gonne's physical beauty seems to be anachronistic with modern life. In *Autobiographies*, Yeats writes, she (Maud Gonne) "looked as though she lived in an ancient civilization where all superiorities whether of the mind or the body were a part of public ceremonial," (David Ross, 180).

In Greek history, Troy was a city that was completely destroyed during the Trojan War, which was fought over the abduction of Helen (Mariese Ribas Stankiewicz, 77). Yeats suggests that Maud Gonne's courageous and fearless character can cause great damage and destruction: being what she is, what else can she do but destroy? (Eunice Slinn, 58). As Richard Ellmann puts it, "The success of the poem comes partly from the poet's withholding the identification of his beloved with Helen until the last line, when it fairly explodes. Yeats manages this by basing the identification not merely on beauty, but also on destructive power, and thus shunning sentimentality." (Richard Ellmann, 111). Here, Troy is a symbol of Yeats's heart, suffering great damage upon Maud Gonne's refusal, devastated and filled with pain and sorrow. In fact, there is not another Troy to be destroyed since it has already been demolished by Maud Gonne's refusal to be with him. Yeats's romantic love with Maud Gonne ends up with anguish of separation, frustration, and agony (Mariese Ribas Stankiewicz, 79).

This elegant, civilized, and cultivated woman who is compared to "a tightened bow" is suggestive of an archer who is holding a case full with arrows. This image of an archer is associated with the idea of a woman who has a great power, and who is strong enough to defend her own right in any kind of struggle (Eunice Slinn, 58). David Ross argues that the image of "tightened bow" is a symbol that represents the beauty of Maud Gonne as a graceful and elegant woman, while at the same time suggesting that she is a strong woman who can take any kind of action to advocate her own rights and to keep her independence (David Ross, 180-181).

### The Sorrow of Love

The brawling of a sparrow in the eaves,  
The brilliant moon and all the milky sky,  
And all that famous harmony of leaves,  
Had blotted out man's image and his cry.

A girl arose that had red mournful lips  
And seemed the greatness of the world in tears,  
Doomed like Odysseus and the labouring ships  
And proud as Priam murdered with his peers;

Arose, and on the instant clamorous eaves,  
A climbing moon upon an empty sky,  
And all that lamentation of the leaves,  
Could but compose man's image and his cry.

(36-37 CW)

Another poem that deals with the theme of female goddess is “The Sorrow of Love”, in which the mythic lady figures as an image highly suggestive of Maud Gonne and Helen of Troy. Ross argues that the poem opens with an optimistic tone but ends up with pessimistic feelings (David Ross, 231). The idealistic image the young man cherishes in his imagination makes him feel happy for a short time, but then his illusions are destroyed and he feels frustrated when he is rejected by his beloved (Galawezh, 274).

In the beginning, the poem reflects the poet’s creativity and imagination for the rising of a woman, Maud Gonne, who bears resemblance to Helen of Troy (David Ross, 231). In the poem, Maud Gonne is depicted as an omnipotent woman who has the power to make the poet fall in love with her, yet to disrupt the order of nature, bringing sorrow into the world. As Galawezh puts it, “First, the woman inspires the poet with an epic comparison; that once Maud Gonne “moves out into nature, she recasts the moon, sparrow and leaves in terms of human sorrow. Yeats thus suggests the inspiring and sorrowful, nature of love, whether the woman stands

for Ireland, for Maud Gonne, or for the spirit of the feminine, she redefines the force of the world, focusing it into an expression of human sorrow” (Galawezh, 275).

Unterecker points out that the poem clearly depicts a young man’s delusion of happiness engendered by his fantasy of “a brilliant moon”, representing Maud Gonne, and a sense of peace and contentment symbolized by the phrase, “the famous harmony of leaves” (Unterecker, 80). In the first stanza the sparrow, which represents Yeats himself, is singing songs with the hope to reach the vision of Maud Gonne. The poet’s optimistic mood is suggested by the image of “the milky sky” filled with millions of stars, which symbolizes the poet’s fascination with Maud Gonne and his hope that he can attain his beloved (Unterecker,81). Ironically however, this happy vision is suddenly shaken when a girl “with red mournful lips” shows up to unsettle everything by bringing him “the world in tears”, sorrows and troubles, shattering the young man’s illusions into pieces (Unterecker, 80). The sparrow has disappeared to be replaced by “clamorous eaves”. The leaves, which used to be harmonious and peaceful, now produce ugly noises, as suggested by the word “lamentation” (Unterecker, 81). Now the young man’s world is filled with misery, melancholy, and suffering. In the poem, Yeats emphasizes the contrast between the harmony and peacefulness that dominate the atmosphere in the first stanza, and the chaos and mess that result from the shattering of the young man’s illusions in the third stanza (Unterecker, 80). The atmosphere of chaos and disorder that dominates the last stanza is suggested by the closing line of the poem: “Could but compose man's image and his cry” (Unterecker, 81).

At the end of the poem, the sky loses its milky stars as Yeats’s dream of the “brilliant moon” immediately turns into “A climbing moon upon an empty sky”. The sparrow, the singing bird, has totally disappeared to be replaced by “clamorous eaves”, and instead of harmonious sounds, the leaves produce only unpleasant roars (Unterecker, 81).

Arose, and on the instant clamorous eaves,  
A climbing moon upon an empty sky,  
And all that lamentation of the leaves,  
Could but compose man's image and his cry. (36-37 CW)

The theme of female beauty is the subject of another poem, “The Rose of the World.”

### The Rose of the World

WHO dreamed that beauty passes like a dream?  
For these red lips, with all their mournful pride,  
Mournful that no new wonder may betide,  
Troy passed away in one high funeral gleam,  
And Usna's children died.

We and the labouring world are passing by:  
Amid men's souls, that waver and give place  
Like the pale waters in their wintry race,  
Under the passing stars, foam of the sky,  
Lives on this lonely face.

Bow down, archangels, in your dim abode:  
Before you were, or any hearts to beat,  
Weary and kind one lingered by His seat;  
He made the world to be a grassy road  
Before her wandering feet.

(36 CP)

In this poem, the female protagonist is portrayed as a woman who embodies mixed features inherited from two mythologies: While on the one hand Maud Gonne appears to be a female character from the Greek mythology, strongly reminiscent of Helen, who is often represented by the image of “tightened bow”; on the other hand Maud Gonne becomes a symbol of Deirdre from the Irish mythology. According to Peter Alderson, the rose image in the poem does not represent Maud Gonne as a beautiful flower; rather it stands for a combination of the two mythological figures (Peter Alderson, 176).

In the poem, the rose appears as an image of inspiration which effected the creation of the universe. Quite unlike what happens in a traditional poem based on a carpe diem theme which laments over the transitory nature of beauty fading away

with the passage of time, this particular poem inverts this traditional perspective, seeing beauty as the cause rather than the object of destruction. The implication is that Maud Gonne's beauty will cause great damage to Yeats's life and heart (Eunice, 30). Yeats's rose is a symbol associated with a song of praise addressed to his beloved, serving as "paeans to Maud Gonne or, more generally, to the heroic-but-nurturing feminine ideal her young admirer wished her to fulfill." (David Holdeman, 19). The rose that once represented the Helen of ancient Greece for whom "Troy passed away", and the Deirdre of ancient Ireland for whom "Usna's children died", now becomes an image embodied in "this lonely face", which is suggestive of Yeats's beloved, Maud Gonne's visage (David Holdeman, 19).

The opening line of the first stanza -who dreamed that beauty passes like a dream? - implies that woman's beauty is not eternal, and that it is not possible to preserve it in the spiritual realm. However, the destructive power of woman's physical beauty has an everlasting effect, as suggested by the words "for her (Helen's) red lips....Troy passed away in one high funeral gleam" (Alana white, 38).

In the first stanza, Yeats uses the word "dream" to suggest the act of creating an artistic work, just like what a carpe diem poet does. Yeats chooses two mythical figures – Helen and Deirdre- to show how destructive one's beloved could be. Another image of destruction implied in the poem is Helen, who is capable of creating conflicts and wars between nations. In fact, Yeats seems to be suggesting that, just like Helen's, Maud Gonne's beauty has a strong potential for destruction. Similarly, Deirdre is a celebrated Irish woman known for her beauty for whom, as Cathbad, the soothsayer predicted, "More blood will be shed in Ireland since time and race began" (Eunice, 30). With the reference to Usna's children, Maud Gonne is compared to Deirdre who brought suffering on the area of Ulster since too many men were charmed by her beauty. By making an allusion to the story of Deirdre, Yeats wants to show how a beautiful woman may cause the men of her country to fight over her, causing great damage and suffering to Usna's children. In the end, being one of Usna's children, Deirdre loses her life together with them (Galawezh, 276).

In the second stanza of the poem, Yeats refers to his beloved Maud Gonne as a Muse, a source of inspiration for him to write this poem. His beloved is blessed with eternal beauty, which stands in sharp contrast to the transient nature of men's

souls “that waver and give place, / Like the pale waters in their wintry race”. Metaphorically, associations are formed between Yeats’s heart and the symbols of winter and water. Just like running water, life is quickly passing by under conditions of continuous winter and one can do nothing to change this reality. The transitory nature of all phenomena is further suggested by the image of “foam of the sky”, which comes up as an inversion of the traditional conception of stars as constant celestial bodies. Instead, the stars seem to be empty, transient and unreal (Eunice, 30-31). The second stanza ends with the image of Maud Gonne’s “lonely face” on which everything in this world is reflected, and through which Yeats celebrates his beloved’s immortality. Yeats suggests that while most human beings pass by like a dream, Maud Gonne’s “lonely face” will live on (Alana white, 39).

Whereas the first two stanzas of the poem are dominated by the image of earthly woman, the dominant image of the last stanza is that of divine woman (Alana White, 39). In the third stanza, Yeats celebrates Maud Gonne as an exceptional woman whose eternal beauty seems to have become a source of inspiration behind the creation of the whole world, as suggested in the lines, “He made the world to be a grassy road,/ Before her wandering feet” (Eunice , 31).

According to Alana White, Yeats says that “the female form (or the Platonic ideal) was in God's mind before any other creation took place” (Alana White, 39). As the title of the poem indicates, Maud Gonne is the rose of the world which was created in her honor; hence, she should be honored and praised by the whole universe (Alana White, 39). Maud Gonne is so beautiful that she deserves to be worshipped even by archangels. According to the Catholic doctrine, Michael, the archangel, is a leading figure in the everlasting war with Satan. Here, the implication is that Michael would quit the duty he was assigned, so that he can honor Maud Gonne by designing a crown decorated with flowers and precious stones. Even archangels “bow down” before his beloved’s eternal beauty. It is as if the world was created as a grassy field specially created for her to walk on (Galawezh, 276).

An important image in Yeats's poetry is that of the fairies, who are depicted as complex creatures with an ambivalent nature –they can at once a blessing and a threat. *The Wandering of Oisín* takes as its theme the influence of fairies on the poet's state of mind. While the fairies can become a source of inspiration for Yeats to produce better works, they can also pose a serious danger to him by threatening him with death. Yeats recognizes that the fairies are often considered to be a symbol of imaginative power closely associated with mythological female figures. He hopes that they will give him the opportunity to gain access to the rose (the birth place of his thoughts, imagination, and ideas concerning Ireland). If so, he will enjoy an amusing and delightful journey to his own insights, as well as an enhanced ability to write about his rose. The fairies are agents of the rose through which it sends messages and information to Yeats. They fulfill their duties by tempting the poet to travel to the world of imagination by offering him a deeper knowledge of the rose. By following the temptations of the fairies as imaginative creatures with a supernatural power, Yeats can seek and easily find the secrets of the rose, which has an extremely powerful influence on his imagination (Peter Alderson Smith, 178-179).

A second thought concerning the fairies could be that they can be described as powerful creatures who assist Yeats in exploring the rose. The fairies are described as creatures living in peace and harmony because they stand closer to the rose than men. The fairies, who enjoy the company of the rose, will set Yeats free so that he can begin a journey in his mind through the inspiration he gets from the rose. Like “the fairies of folklore” in Irish mythology, the fairies have no sense of morality. They are unpredictable creatures whose actions are induced by sudden desire. Yeats recognizes the potential threat involved in the seductive manners of the fairies, who act like *sirens* (dangerous yet beautiful women in Greek mythology who used to attract unwary sailors with their enchanting music) (Peter Alderson Smith, 180).

In *The Wanderings of Oisín*, Yeats presents Niamh through images that are closely associated with Maud Gonne (Comak, 7). Niamh is an Irish fairy queen and goddess in Irish mythology. She is a beautiful woman whom no one has the power to resist. Her name has two meanings: “beauty and brightness” (Unterecker, 52).

Yeats had great fascination for Maud Gonne who became a muse, a source of inspiration for him. (Margaret Rudd, 45):

He loved her as troubadours loved their ladies, and she seemed  
as unattainable. He was twenty when he first met this beautiful,  
vibrant woman, violent in her political fanaticism and breath- taking  
in her heroic loveliness. Yeats fell desperately in love.

In fact, Yeats “drew on Gonne and her beauty and her physical energy as subject matter for his poetry” (Valerie Rodriguez, 2). However, behind her beauty and charm lurks a strong potential for damage and destruction. The image of lover/beloved as a person with a destructive power (*femme fatale*) (Rached Khalifa, 7), is a reflection of “the love-death motif,” which is typical of Yeats’s literary works (Comak, 7) to the very beginning of the poem. When Oisín meets Niamh for the first time he describes her as a White Goddess who figures as a combination of a young lady, mother and old woman. Actually, the image of white, red, and black goddess represents birth and growth, love and battle, death and divination respectively (Comak, 2). Oisín portrays his beloved as a combination of red and white, while at the same time comparing her white face to the moon and associating her with love and death. Niamh’s red lips are strongly reminiscent of Helen of Troy, particularly her destructive nature: “And like a sunset were her lips, / A stormy sunset on doomed ships”. These lines suggest that behind Niamh’s physical beauty is a hidden potential for destruction and danger. This land of youth -“the Isle of Joy”- is protected by the moon: “Music and love and sleep await, / Where I would be when the white moon climbs, / The red sun falls”. Niamh is depicted with the image of the moon goddess, taking her lover on a white horse to the land of youth (Comak, 7):

A pearl-pale, high born lady, who rode  
On a horse with a bridle of findrinny;  
And like a sunset were her lips,  
A stormy sunset on doomed ships

(361-395 CW)

Oisín, an Irish warrior and one of Niamh's lovers, is invited by the fairy Niamh to the land of immortal youth. He leaves his companion fellows to join the fairy Niamh in her journey to the other world of the "land of promise" (Patricia Monaghan, 358), also called "The land of isle of ever living" or "The land of youth" (Comak, 7). Niamh calls Oisín to leave all his worldly affairs behind and submit to the beauty of "the land of youth" which is ruled by her if he really wants to live in a genuine state of happiness and satisfaction in the "land of promise" (David Ross, 119). In this land of everlasting youth, Oisín is offered a life full of eternal fulfillment, pleasure, and a strong feeling of love. Niamh tells her lover that if he should touch the real world, he will be sure to grow old and die. As it turns out, Oisín cannot resist the temptation to go back to his homeland. However, no sooner does he arrive in the real world than grows old and dies (Comak, 7).

In the poem, the masculine world of Oisín is balanced against the feminine world of Niamh. The world of fairies is governed by Niamh, is a domain characterized by beauty, sexuality, and romance. Yeats calls attention to the sexual nature of the relationship between Niamh and Oisín, accusing him of getting interested in the physical aspect of love rather than seeking true love: "(Oisín has) known three centuries, poets sing,/Of dalliance with a demon thing". On the other hand, the description of the first island abounds in images suggesting heterosexual relations, as can be seen in the following phrases taken from the poem: "men and ladies, hand in hand", "men and ladies" , "girl and boy", "youth and lady". By contrast, the world of the Fenians is characterized by fighting, heroic action and men's companionship. Oisín depicts the world of the Fenians through unsightly scenes filled with weapons, hunting, blood, and combat. Oisín is asked to return to the world of Fenians, where he came from. Oisín himself is longing to go back to his homeland. Unlike the men living in the world of Fenians who enjoy the company of

one another and act with feelings of comradeship, the men and women living in the Sidhe are involved in romantic affairs. (Marjorie Howes, 28-29).

### The Cap and Bells

The jester walked in the garden:  
The garden had fallen still;  
He bade his soul rise upward  
And stand on her window-sill.

It rose in a straight blue garment,  
When owls began to call:  
It had grown wise-tongued by thinking  
Of a quiet and light footfall;

But the young queen would not listen;  
She rose in her pale night-gown;  
She drew in the heavy casement  
And pushed the latches down.

He bade his heart go to her,  
When the owls called out no more;  
In a red and quivering garment  
It sang to her through the door.

It had grown sweet-tongued by dreaming  
Of a flutter of flower-like hair;  
But she took up her fan from the table  
And waved it off on the air.

'I have cap and bells,' he pondered,  
'I will send them to her and die';  
And when the morning whitened  
He left them where she went by.

She laid them upon her bosom,  
Under a cloud of her hair,  
And her red lips sang them a love-song  
Till stars grew out of the air.

She opened her door and her window,  
And the heart and the soul came through,  
To her right hand came the red one,  
To her left hand came the blue.

They set up a noise like crickets,  
A chattering wise and sweet,  
And her hair was a folded flower  
And the quiet of love in her feet.

(61-62 CW)

In “The Cap and Bells”, Yeats turns to the Irish traditional mythology of ‘Terrible Mother’ to associate Ireland with the image of a woman with an excessive desire to consume her lover and sentence him to death. This elderly woman who changes herself to a young queen looks as intimidating as the Irish ‘Terrible Mother’ in the form of the triple goddesses Sheela-na-gig’, ‘Leanhaun Shee’, and ‘Morrighu’. Sheelagh na Gig, the goddess of creation and destruction, has a “blatant sexual nature” which is closely associated with “male fear-fantasies of the devouring mother.” The second type of ‘Terrible Mother’ is Leanhaun Shee, who was considered by Yeats as goddess that lives in solitude, but has a strong influence on men As Yeats put it (Patrick. J. Kean, x),

(Leanhaun Shee) seeks the love of men. If they refuse, she is their slave; if they consent, they are hers, her lovers waste away, for she lives on their life. Most of the Gaelic poets, down to quite recent times, have had a Leanhaun Shee as a source of inspiration; she is the Gaelic muse, (the malignant fairy), as her lovers, the Gaelic poets, died young, she grew restless, and carried them away to other worlds, for death

does not destroy her power.

Leanhaun Shee, who is known to be a muse that is at once inspiring and destructive, sharpens the poet's imagination, yet causes him to die. On the personal level, this goddess represents his own muse Maud Gonne (Patrick. J. Kean, x). The third of these goddesses is the Morrighu, the Irish goddess of warfare, who is described as "one-eyed and with the head of the crow." This goddess is likened to the Valkyries, the twelve-handed handmaidens whose job is to choose which of the fighters will live or die in combat. The Morrighu has the head of an animal with black feathers, just like a 'crow'. She is also imagined as a vulture and a raven, This Egyptian goddess has the duty of observing and looking after dead bodies in the underground world. This goddess rips apart the corpses into many pieces (Patrick. J. Kean, xi). This Irish goddess often appears in the form of a bird flying over dead bodies to devour them (Patricia Monaghan, 339-340). These devouring females embodied in the image of 'Terrible Mother' can be compared to the female spider which kills and eats the male spider after having an intercourse with him (Patrick. J. Kean, xi). No matter what form she takes – spider, snake, hyena, or sow- the devouring goddess, a manifestation of the Terrible Mother, figures as a muse that at once inspires and destroys poets (Patrick. J. Kean, xii).

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Yeats seemed to view his art as a kind of sacrifice made to praise and honor beautiful women such as Olivia Shakespear, Maud Gonne, the Mother Goddess (Ireland) and the Rose, as "a passionate tribute that could substitute for real sexual, emotional, political, or spiritual fulfillments" (David Holdeman, 32-33).

As a poet deeply interested in mythological figures as well as in the fin de siècle, Yeats used images of goddesses who seemed to have fascinated him with their beauty and become a source of inspiration for him, but whose charm has often proved to be destructive (Patrick. J. Kean, xii). In "Caps and Bells", the dominant image is that of an old woman ("Woman-as-Mother Ireland") transformed into a beautiful lady ("Woman-as-Muse") with the noble manners of a queen, who seductively attracts men to their graves (Patrick. J. Kean, xvi).

The image of the young queen is reminiscent of the Irish goddesses 'Gaelic muse' or 'Malignant Fairy', whose physical beauty could prove damaging and

destructive to the lover (Patrick. J. Kean, 26). According to the Irish mythology, the offering of the jester- the Cap and Bells- can be compared to “the youthful lover’s relation to the Great Mother”. First, the jester succumbs to his destiny, then he cherishes some hope that, just like nature, he will “be reborn through the Great Mother, out of the fullness of her grace” through a process that develops beyond his control (Patrick. J. Kean, 27). The mother goddess and her jester - the beloved and her lover- are both connected through an act of total sacrifice. As David Kinsley puts it, “The underlying intuition or perception in these cults seems to be that these goddesses, who are associated with fertility, must be periodically re-nourished. In order to give life, they must receive life back in the form of blood sacrifices” (David Kinsley, 146).

In his poem “The Cap and Bells”, Yeats draws an analogy between the Gaelic goddess and Maude Gonne. Metaphorically, the poet presents himself as the ‘jester’ (clown) who uses his creative power to his beloved so that she will accept him. The poem centers on the theme of mother goddess to whom Yeats offers his artistic creation. This theme is closely linked with the concept of the queen as beloved and the jester as a lover. The image of the lover strongly devoted to his beloved is emblematic of the strong bond between the poet and his country. The mother goddess demands a special sacrifice. So, the jester goes to the house where the young queen lives. Then, he asks her to open the window, requesting her to open her heart and soul to him. Despite all his efforts, the jester cannot win the affections of the queen until he offers her his cap and bells, which symbolizes his artistic talents. This offering enlivens his spirit and heart so that they sing together. Ironically however, this total sacrifice which aims to win the queen’s love, requires him to put an end to his life (David Holdeman, 32). As Marjorie Howes and John Kelly point out, “The jester in ‘The Cap and Bells’ does capture the heart of the queen, though he has to die to do it” (Marjorie Howes, John Kelly, 4).

The queen is portrayed as a lady with paradoxical features: she is at once passionate and reserved, kind and terrifying (Patrick. J. Kean, 24). The young queen is pictured as a cool and indifferent lady who cannot be attained without a great offering. She will not accept the jester’s offerings of his soul and heart till he becomes wiser and sweeter. Here, the colors red and blue are used as symbols that

represent the poet's heart and soul (Young suck Rhee, 190). Then, the owl starts to sing out at night while the jester steps in the garden of his beloved queen in which he offers his soul. While the whole day is turning to nightfall, the owl starts to sing out as the soul "rose in a straight blue garment". The soul here is related to the blue color, which is a symbol of the pessimism and despair of the jester. Yet, just before the dawn, the owl stops singing while the jester starts singing to the queen in his attempt to send her his heart, which begins to beat heavily, for it is motivated by a strong love for his queen (Patrick. J. Kean, 24). The jester's aim is to gain the affection of his young queen and to capture her attention. The jester's first offer - sacrificing his soul- is significant in two senses: Firstly, it reveals his strong devotion to the queen. Secondly, it suggests the separation (or rather the emancipation) of the soul from the limitations of the body. Thus, the jester is able to elevate himself to the spiritual world by going beyond his physical nature (Dustin Walbom, 22-23).

However, unmoved by this offering, the queen rejects the jester's heart. The queen moves towards the window and locks it as a way of rejecting the jester's offering of his soul. The queen is totally indifferent to the jester's request. In fact, she shows no emotion or excitement in her response to him. This is the second time the jester is refused by the queen, which is all the more agonizing to him since the queen does not seem to care about him at all: "she took up her fan from the table, / and waved it off on the air" (Patrick. J. Kean, 24). The presence of the owl is important in the sense that it represents the spiritual part of the jester, which is expected to make it easy for him to present his gift -the soul. Yet in the second offering, deprived of the support of the owl, the jester finds it difficult to transcend his physical nature, represented by his heart. Traditionally, the owl is seen as an embodiment of wisdom while jesters are considered to be intelligent people, though they are paradoxically called "fools". The owl is suggestive of the wisdom of the jester's soul. In the absence of the owl (deprived of both wisdom and soul), the jester has to rely on his physical nature (his heart) to win the queen's love. Ultimately, however, his efforts to do so come to nothing since he lacks the wisdom and soul of the owl (Dustin Walbom, 24). The jester's attempt to sacrifice himself to win his queen's love supports the idea that Yeats respected and adored Maud Gonne throughout his life (Dustin Walbom, 25).

All through his life, Yeats desperately tried to attain Maud Gonne, but he could not succeed in winning her love. Yeats's failure to make Maud Gonne return his love seems to have stemmed from the fact that in his early life "he was sweet, (but) not wise enough," yet in the second part of his life "he was wise, but not sweet as he was before" (Young suck Rhee, 190). Yeats comes to conclude that his queen Maude Gonne can be obtained only by a complete and absolute action of giving up his soul and heart and also his cap and bells, this action of surrendering his life will be a gift to his queen which will be accepted by her, but it will cost him his own life. (Patrick. J. Kean, xiii).

In 'The Cap and Bells', the jester has offered the queen his soul and heart (his spiritual and emotional being), only to be refused by her. Then, the jester makes up his mind to offer his beloved "what is most essential and individual in him," (Richard Ellmann, 251); namely his cap and bells, which represent his very existence (Patrick. J. Kean, 25). The jester begins to show his special skills by using his cap and bells as a magical instrument like the magician's rod, which is thought to have a magical power used in casting a spells. Once the jester employs his caps and bells as a powerful instrument, the young queen is charmed by the spell of this magical offering, whereupon a significant change occurs in her attitude to him. In the end, the queen accepts the jester's offering and sings all day long in response to this "total" sacrifice (Dustin Walbom, 24).

The jester first offers up his soul which is in "straight blue garment", and then he sacrifices his heart in "red and quivering garment". Both offerings are an expression of the jester's love for his beloved young queen; yet, the queen will refuse the jester's offering till he sacrifices the cap and bells (Lawrence Saylor, 8). As Richard Ellmann points out, "The jester, after first sending the queen the trappings of common romance, finally offers the cap and bells which are his alone, and she, obdurate before the familiar and grandiloquent gifts of heart and soul, yields when the jester sends what is most essential and individual in him" (Richard Ellmann, 251)

In the poem, the 'cap' is an expression of the jester's progress after he dies. When he was alive, the jester had always imagined her "footfall" and her "hair". Once he dies, his gifts are placed by the queen on her chest, his princess, for these gifts, she starts to sing a song to express her love for him: "upon her bosom, / Under

a cloud of her hair,” while “her red lips” sang them a “love-song.” Then, opening her door and window, she lets the jester’s heart and soul get in. The heart (“the red one”) rests on her right hand while the soul (“the blue one”) rests on her left hand. Then, the heart and soul start “chattering wise and sweet.”

The jester’s decision to put an end to his life by separating his head from his body is symbolic of his voluntary emasculation (Patrick. J. Kean, 25).

The jester’s parting with his cap and bells suggests his readiness to sacrifice his life for the sake of the queen. The outcome of the jester’s action is that the red heart goes to his beloved’s right hand and the blue soul to her left hand. The fact that the red heart and the blue soul show up again seems to be an indication of the jester’s rebirth. The union of the queen and the jester at the end of the poem resolves the antithesis between heart and soul, sweet and wise, red and blue that dominates the entire poem. This reconciliation between the red and blue becomes evident in the last stanza as these colors “set up a noise like crickets, / a chattering wise and sweet” (Lawrence Saylor, 8-9)

## CONCLUSION

William Butler Yeats was strongly critical about the unfair attitude of the Catholic Church which deprived women of the right to enjoy autonomy and freedom as independent individuals, as well as the right to have access to job opportunities on equal terms with men. The notion of “The Free State”, which was based on the idea that the Irish government was to be subjected to the teachings of the Catholic Church, presupposed a set of repressive rules that discriminated against women. According to the teachings of the Catholic Church, any attempt to give women equal status with men in society would be regarded as a serious threat to the ideal image of the Catholic woman as well as to the fundamental doctrines of the Church. The biased attitude in Irish society toward women robbed them of the chance to achieve equal status to men. The public image of women in contemporary Irish society can be clearly seen in one of Yeats’s cycle of poems “A Woman Young and Old” (1933) where Yeats concentrates on the personality and character of the female images rather than focusing on their physical appearance. The female characters that appear in these poems voice their desire to enjoy equal rights in the community. Through this sequence of poems, the reader can easily recognize women’s reaction against the restrictive laws and the traditional values of the Catholic Church, which were an integral part of Irish nationality as well. In some his poems, including “A Woman Young and Old”, Yeats criticizes the Catholic Church for its inhuman attitude toward women and its tendency to see them as inferior beings. On the other hand, the reader can find that Yeats uses the rose symbol as an image of the ideal woman who desires to be free and independent. It is important to note that the image of rose as a symbol of woman’s physical existence has implications of female beauty and charm, while woman’s spiritual existence is associated with what lies in the heart, one’s deepest feelings, and Yeats’s dreams for his rose. By and large, Yeats represents the rose as an identical symbol for both Maud Gonne and Ireland. By so doing, he reveals his

never-ending hope for his beloved and his country to be liberated from all the restrictions imposed upon them.

For Yeats, women are compared to roses; in fact, he uses the symbol of rose as a means to emphasize Maud Gonne's beauty. Through the concept of the rose, Yeats transforms Maud Gonne into a temporal image of eternal beauty. Yeats uses the image of the rose to represent his strong devotion to Ireland, a feeling that is shared by his beloved, Maud Gonne, as well. It is evident that the poet's love for Maud Gonne is inseparable from his love for Ireland. On the other hand, Maud Gonne seems to be a symbol of women's impulse to revolt against all kinds of restrictions imposed upon women in a patriarchal society. Viewed from this perspective, the rose can be seen as a symbol Maud Gonne's revolting spirit, her desire to break out of the chains of traditional society. As a strong and independent woman, Maud Gonne feels an intense desire to achieve independence, setting herself free from all constraints imposed upon her.

Also, one should also consider the image of Helen as the destructive goddess who represents Maud Gonne, particularly emphasizing her potential for damage and destruction. Besides, Yeats adopts the image of woman as a muse who has the power to reconcile diametrically opposed concepts such as love and death, beauty and destruction. Through the image of the goddess, Yeats suggests that his beloved is represented by the image of the goddess Helen, or by a combination of goddesses including Helen and the other goddesses in the Irish mythology. Another symbol of Maud Gonne is the Irish goddess, the Morrigan, who is at once the muse and the great mother, Ireland; she is the goddess who will not be attained without a total sacrifice on the part of her lover. Yeats elevates his beloved, Maud Gonne, to the level of a goddess, regarding the world as a majestic carpet which has been created in her honor. The only thing that makes this world valuable and meaningful to him is the very existence of a powerful, free, and independent woman in society, a woman strong enough to struggle to gain equal rights like men

In Yeats's poetic vision, women are not always depicted through images of beauty; in some cases, they are portrayed as fascinating goddesses whose beauty masks their strong potential for destruction. Inverting the mythical image of Helen as a woman with fascinating beauty, Yeats uses her as a symbol of destructive beauty, as in "No Second Troy." In this poem, Helen's destructive nature, hidden behind her

beauty, is depicted through the image of “a tightened bow” which has caused great damage to the poet’s heart. Similarly, Helen is associated with the Irish goddess Deirdre in the poem “The Sorrow of Love”, and with the Irish fairy-goddess Niamh in the poem “The Wanderings of Oisín”. Ultimately, all these Irish goddesses are linked to Yeats’s beloved Maud Gonne (Krishma Chaudhary, 13). Yeats’s passion for Maud Gonne is so intense that, symbolically, he faces destruction due to his deep love for his beloved.

. Another mythical figure symbolizing Maud Gonne in the person of the queen in “The Cap and Bells” is Morrighu, and the goddess of Irish traditions, who is associated particularly with fertility and vegetation, as well as damage and destruction. In the poem, the jester’s act of sacrifice for his goddess suggests rebirth, the beginning of a new life after death. This is an indication of regeneration after loss of productivity. Metaphorically, Yeats’s dreams and imaginations might die for a short while, yet they will always be recreated every day. The poet’s vision of eternity has no limits because the image of his beloved will bloom again and again in his heart. In fact, every day is a new day for Yeats to re-establish his visions and refresh his artistic creativity to express his love for his beloved. Yeats concludes that his queen Maude Gonne can be attained only by a complete action -giving up his soul and heart, as well as his cap and bells. Surrendering his life as a gift to the queen will cost him his own life. Paradoxically, Yeats’s experience of agony and frustration in his love for Maud Gonne will give him the inspiration necessary to achieve artistic creativity. Yeats admitted the fact that the frustration of his love for Maud Gonne was the driving force behind his most powerful poetry, a view that was also shared by Maud Gonne herself when she stated that “you make beautiful poetry out of what you call your unhappiness and you are happy in that. Marriage would be such a dull affair. Poets should never marry. The world should thank me for not marrying you” (Comak, 34).

The image of woman as a “rose”, “muse” and “femme fatale” occupies a central place in Yeats’s poetry. Reading his poems on women, one gains a deep insight into established attitudes toward women by the male portion of society as well as women’s position in society. In this study, this particular topic has been discussed within a personal, historical, and mythological framework. In the first place, Yeats’s poetry is marked by a tendency to unite his artistic creativity with his

personal life, which can be clearly noted in his conviction that “Literature is always personal, always one man’s vision of the world, one man’s experiences” (Krishma Chaudhary, 12). Therefore, it is not surprising that Yeats’s personal experiences, particularly those related to Maud Gonne, lie in the core of his poetic creation.



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