

As evident upon examining the works of various poets, the theme of mutability is prominent in Irish literature. While living through significant upheavals catalyzed by the invasions of the British, Irish poets explored the external and internal manifestations of change. Within "The Old Woman of Beare," "'Civil Irish' and 'Wild Irish,'" and "September 1913," the poets address the theme on personal, societal, and national levels, respectively. In each of these works, the poets reveal that external change, whether embraced or mourned over, almost inevitably parallels a negative internal change within the subjects of their poems.

In "The Old Woman of Beare," the poet primarily examines change on a personal level, using the life of a single woman to convey the external and internal manifestations of mutability. Throughout the poem, the subject acknowledges various external changes, from her physical appearance to her companions and pastimes. Once a beautiful woman who dined with and entertained kings, she now lives in an isolated nunnery, anticipating death while surrounded by "stinking hags" ("The Old Woman" 63). The bitterness of these words suggests the woman's resistance to the new religious order and the effect it has on her lifestyle (Madden). Throughout the poem, the speaker possesses a painful awareness of the external manifestations of change, referring to her "shrunken thighs" and how her skin stretches "tight on the bone" ("The Old Woman" 62-64). In many ways, the poet presents the woman as a victim of change, unable to escape the passage of time or the cultural shifts that come with it.

While the poet addresses the external manifestations of change within "The Old Woman of Beare," he or she also uses the work to examine how the realization of those changes affects the subject internally. Throughout the poem, the old woman struggles with her preconceived notions of time and beauty, reminiscing about her youth and despairing over her current state. At one point in the poem she queries, "Does not every season prove / That the acorn hits the

ground? / Have I not known enough of love / To know it's lost as soon as found?" ("The Old Woman" 63). Through this passage, the poet expresses the idea that on a personal level, change remains both paradoxically inevitable and surprising. The passage of time and the cultural shift towards Christianity left the subject, once perhaps the quintessence of beauty and allure, disillusioned by her fate and chewing "the cud of prayer" ("The Old Woman" 63). While "thrilled...to my fingertips" with wine in her youth, external changes in the speaker's body and circumstances reduced her to hating women's eyes and wishing for times past ("The Old Woman" 62-64). Within the poem, the subject's awareness of external changes serves as a catalyst for the internal manifestations of mutability, transforming her from a carefree young woman to an old woman plagued by nostalgia and sadness. *good*

Through the old woman, the poet explores the reality of change, revealing its potential to negatively alter that which once seemed immutable. At one point in the poem, the speaker says that, "The young sun / Gives its youth to everyone / Touching everything with gold," suggesting that while enjoying the beauty and pleasure of her youth, the subject never anticipated such a drastic change in either herself or her surroundings ("The Old Woman" 63). While the poet writes of various negative external manifestations of change in both the woman's aging body and reduced circumstances, the poem suggests that the subject's memories and internal longings are equally, if not more, painful. In the same way the subject mourns the physical evidence of her body's decay, her spirit grieves over the loss of what poets such as Yeats refer to as "Romantic *Wice* Ireland" (Yeats 39). The evidence of her sorrow exists in her nostalgia regarding the brave young men she once loved and her realization that such men no longer exist ("The Old Woman" 63). Due to the external and internal manifestations of mutability, the old woman lives in discord with

her present circumstances; she longs for the beauty and gallantry found in her memories of the past but can do nothing to renew them (Madden).

Within “‘Civil Irish’ and ‘Wild Irish,’” Laoiseach Mac an Bhaird examines the external and internal manifestations of mutability on a societal level. He first focuses on the external evidence of change, primarily using differences of dress to differentiate between the ‘civil Irish’ and ‘wild Irish.’ In regard to the former, the poet writes that those who follow English ways cut their long hair and wear doublets, hose, jeweled spurs and other finery (Mac an Bhaird 218). In regard to the latter, he presents E’oghan B’an as a physical example of the ‘wild Irish’ and as a foil for the portion of society that adopts English customs. Unlike the facet of society influenced by the British, the poet writes that B’an considers gold-embroidered cloaks, a high well-furnished ruff, a gold ring or a satin scarf unnecessary and “vexatious” (Mac an Bhaird 218). In addition, he has long hair, which Mac an Bhaird refers to as “the best adornment in all the land of Ireland” (Mac an Bhaird 218). Through these descriptions of physical appearances, the poet supplies clear and myriad examples of the external manifestations of change in the ‘civil Irish.’

On the surface of the poem, it seems as if Mac an Bhaird places greater emphasis on the external manifestations of mutability in Irish society. However, while discussing the external evidence, such as hair and fashion, he actually reveals the internal manifestations of change within the ‘civil Irish.’ In the opening lines of the poem, he writes, “you [the ‘civil Irish’] are unlike the good son of Donnchadh,” suggesting a fundamental difference between the ‘wild Irish’ and those who assimilate English customs (Mac an Bhaird 218). He states that B’an, perhaps the epitome of Irish nationalism and tradition, “has not set his heart on English ways” and “does not set his heart on a feather bed” (Mac an Bhaird 219). Here the poet suggests that the ‘civil Irish’ had lost sight of their values, placing unwarranted importance on things such as

clothing and material possessions. Through these passages, the poet argues that external manifestations of change are merely the outward signs of a changed heart. The materialism of the 'civil Irish' contradicted the hospitality and generosity valued by men like B'an, who would "give breeches away for a trifle" (Mac an Bhaird 218). Likewise, the adoption of English dress and short hair signified an abandonment of their Irish identity (Madden). Therefore, by embracing external English customs, the 'civil Irish' internally forsook the qualities historically valued by Irish men.

According to Mac an Bhaird, the 'civil Irish' had strayed so far from tradition in both their physical appearances and values that they no longer belonged to the people he calls the 'wild Irish.' When addressing those who conformed to English customs, the poet writes, "Your ideas are nothing to E'oghan B'an" (Mac an Bhaird 218). This passage conveys a fundamental difference between the 'civil Irish' and 'wild Irish' that transcends the external manifestations of change. The internal manifestations that accompanied changes of dress and style left the 'civil Irish' bereft of the qualities that defined men like B'an. Mac an Bhaird writes, "men laugh at you as you put your foot on the mounting-block; it is a pity that you yourself don't see your errors, O you who follow English ways" (Mac an Bhaird 218). This passage suggests that the 'civil Irish' could not see the way in which the external manifestations of change that they so readily adopted affected the society as a whole. By externally adopting English customs, they embraced their own domination and encouraged others to do so (Madden). These internal manifestations of mutability disgusted Mac an Bhaird and the 'wild Irish,' who could see that finery and short hair revealed a fickle heart no longer devoted to Old Ireland and its values.

Through "September 1913," Yeats examines the theme of mutability and its external and internal manifestations on a national level. He first writes that the people of Ireland "fumble in a

greasy till” and add “prayer to shivering prayer,” suggesting that they spend their days preoccupied with material wealth and personal well-being (Yeats 38-39). In contrast, the old nationalists had “little time...to pray,” instead devoting their lives to revolution and an independent Ireland (Yeats 39). He presents the ‘wild geese’ and members of the United Irishmen as true nationalists, who continued to fight for change up until their exile or death (Madden). Through this poem, Yeats implies that the modern nationalists lived lives of comparative complacency, failing to follow the example of men like O’Leary in exhibiting their dissatisfaction with British rule. Their inaction and willingness to live what he considers superficial bourgeois lives, portrays the external manifestation of change within Ireland during the early 1900s (Madden).

While Yeats briefly addresses the external manifestations of change, he primarily uses “September 1913” to examine the negative, internal manifestations of mutability. When Yeats writes that, “Romantic Ireland’s dead and gone, / It’s with O’Leary in the grave,” he refers to the ideals and traditions that the people of Ireland once valued on a national level (Yeats 39). Early revolutionaries believed in an Ireland worth dying for, and possessed a sacrificial love for their nation. In contrast, the new nationalists continued to pray and save until they had “dried the marrow from the bone” (Yeats 39). Here, Yeats suggests that the modern nationalists lacked the vitality and passion that motivated men such as O’Leary, Edward Fitzgerald, Robert Emmet and Wolfe Tone. According to Yeats, the nationalists had lost sight of their priorities and therefore Ireland had lost its greatest hope for regaining independence.

Through “September 1913,” Yeats implies that the external and internal manifestations of change in the modern nationalists led to the death of “Romantic Ireland.” Without conviction and the “delirium of the brave,” they could never restore Irish independence or honor the sacrifices

made by the early nationalists (Yeats 39). Criticizing the present-day revolutionaries, Yeats writes that the early nationalists “were of a different kind” and that even their names “stilled your childish play” (Yeats 39). Such men had the power to inspire others, epitomizing all that “Romantic Ireland” stood for. In contrast, Yeats writes that the modern nationalists would say that, ““Some woman’s yellow hair / Has maddened every mother’s son”” (Yeats 39). In this passage he suggests that the new nationalists did not possess or understand the sacrificial love and devotion men like O’Leary, Fitzgerald, Emmet and Tone exhibited. Overall, Yeats uses external and internal manifestations of mutability to show the extent to which the modern nationalists fell short of their predecessors’ example; the poem suggests that without men willing to follow in their footsteps, the early revolutionaries had died in vain.

In summary, these three works not only prove the existence of both external and internal manifestations of mutability in Irish literature, but reveal a strong correlation between the two. “The Old Woman of Beare” addresses the way in which physical deterioration and cultural shifts can produce great loss and sorrow, “Civil Irish and ‘Wild Irish’” examines the way in which something as simple as fashion can reveal a fickle heart, and “September 1913” explores the way in which inaction demonstrates both self-centeredness and superficiality. Overall, these works indicate that Irish poets wanted their audiences to understand the nature of change and the theme’s relevance. They did not write these poems for entertainment but to promote introspection on personal, societal and national levels using relatable examples and well-known, historical figures. The poets used these three works to demonstrate that the visible, external manifestations of mutability often possessed negative internal counterparts that their audiences should acknowledge and address.

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