

TOPIC: *Irish literature has been characterized as one of loss. Examine this phenomenon of loss and consider a range of different types of loss in your response.*

Ireland has gone through many tough periods with both Christians and British invading their land and trying to change their culture and ways of living. This had a great influence on many writers of the time, which has made Irish Literature unique among other European literatures. One strong focus that can be found in Irish Literature can be characterized as loss. This loss can come in many different forms. Several different types of work help illustrate some of the different types of loss; for example the loss of Ireland's nature and landscape, the loss of a loved one, the loss of great and influential leaders, or the loss of time gone by. I would like to examine some of these poems and their version of loss more closely to show how Irish people handled the troubles they faced in Ireland.

The first poem, "Kilcash", talks about something very important to the Irish, which is Ireland's nature. Very often in Irish literature the inspiration for their work comes from the deep love of their land. This poem was written before the 1800's when the British first started to invade Ireland and when Catholics tried taking over the land and people. The author saw his land, full of rich foliage and wildlife, start to disappear as the invaders came in. Valuable resources such as timber were taken from Ireland's woods and brought back to Britain to make items such as ships. Soon the lush landscape was turned into a dull emptiness, which also caused wildlife to disappear.

One reason this poem is important to Irish Literature is because it concerns an important topic, such as the Irish nature, as well as the damage the invaders first inflicted when they came to Ireland. The writer has the memory of the past, but the poem also shows the reality of his present time. In the first stanza he talks about the house being gone. This represents many

aspects of Irish culture--with the house in this poem symbolizing the people of Ireland. When the home of a family falls into despair, it can be seen as all of Ireland falling into despair. The Irish had their own type of cast system, where poets were very important to the people; however, this too was displaced when Britain invaded.

The next poem is a lament poem. Instead of a loss that can be seen by all of Ireland's people, this poem focuses more on one person's personal loss of a loved one. Losing a loved one during this time was not uncommon with Black and Tans coming into Ireland and killing at random to gain knowledge and authority. In the poem "The Lament for Art O'Leary", Eileen O'Leary talks about her husband's death. The wife gives a eulogy of his death. This type of eulogy is a distinct form of Irish writing.

Eileen speaks directly to the reader, telling her emotions of the situation and the love she had for her husband. She reflects on the good in their relationship and how she used to cook and clean for him. However, his sister interrupts her passage and talks about how she is not a good wife and did not bury her brother properly. A quiet funeral was held with no spectacles that might be common with a death of a soldier. His sister also calls out the wife wondering if the wife's feeling of remorse is genuine. Eileen replies with a satire, calling out the murder with much anger and realizing how much they have become weaker and fallen. She wishes ill upon the murderer, hoping he becomes blind and crippled and with no one able to help him out of agony. She also brings up her lineage, saying how great her family history is. By naming off her lineage, she is able to identify to others where she and her husband stand in Ireland's history.

Family lineage is very important to the Irish--you know about everyone in your family tree and how you came to be, compared to the Western way of focusing on the present generation. This sense of loss is important in Irish literature because many people experienced

this type of loss on personal levels. Reflecting on the past also plays an important role because they always wanted to know where they come from, which would enable them to show what kind of future they would behold.

During these troubled times many people stood up against the British army and fought successfully against them. Another sense of loss represented in Irish work is the loss of great leaders of Ireland. William Butler Yeats wrote a poem called "Municipal Gallery Revisited" which gives a perfect example for showing the loss of important revolutionaries in Ireland.

In his poem he starts off giving the reader images of himself walking around a museum looking at paintings. While he is walking around, the image on the paintings he sees brings forth memories of rebellion and he reflects on the past of Ireland. He thinks of all the great leaders that Ireland has had, and what they were able to do for the country. Yeats realizes that no one in the future will be able to live up to the actions done in the past. He also comes across paintings of his friends, Lady Gregory and John Synge. His friends also made great contributions to Ireland's history. Yeats, being a very important and famous writer in Ireland, does not include himself in this list of extraordinary people, but instead says how he is happy to have such friends as these.

With the invasion of Ireland there would indeed be people who would fight against this kind of change. Not only did people fight back against the Black and Tans, as well as the British, but they also fought using literature guiding the readers. The loss of great leaders can also be related to the loss of a loved one. While most people who think upon these people would think of the loss of someone that did great good for the country of Ireland, they never actually knew them personally. However, for Yeats many of these people were his good friends, so his loss is not only of great leaders, but also the loss of loved ones.

Another loss seen in Irish literature is the loss of youth. In the short story "The Dead" written by James Joyce, his main character, Gabriel, lives his life according to himself without thinking much of others. When he sees his wife in a new light, he suddenly realizes that he should have lived his life differently. His loss is the loss of his youth and the decisions he made when he was younger.

After the party that Gabriel throws for the new year, he sees his wife standing alone listening to music. When he asks her why she was just standing there he finds out something he never knew about her, that she loved another man before him. When he starts thinking about what she told him, he realizes that he does not know that much about his wife. He sets out westward to try and make up for lost time and go to his wife's birthplace in order to learn more about her. When he looks out the window at the snow he thinks about how his wife had such a fulfilling childhood and how he did not experience such things while he was growing up. He is also upset how his wife's childhood love, Michael Furey, lived his life with such great passion and was able to fulfill his life in such a short period of time when Gabriel has not been able to. He has lived his life within a routine without experiencing anything new.

Gabriel's sense of loss is his youth. In Irish literature this is important because it shows what can happen if you don't do anything important within your lifetime. He did not value what he had and feels that he has not made any great memories in anyone's life to be lived on after he is gone. While watching the snowfall, he realizes how much he values Ireland's past and how Irish people should also value the past, however, they should not linger in the past too much and try to embrace the present as well.

Ireland's history has seen many different invasions, with each invasion affecting the people and the land. With such history affecting occurrences, it's only natural for these

troubling acts to create a loss for the Irish people. While each person was affected by the invasions, the types of loss they experienced were individual--sometimes experiencing the same type of loss as someone else, and sometimes experiencing a loss different than the next Irish person. However, each loss experienced contributed to the collection that makes up Irish literature.

TOPIC: *Argue Yeats centrality to Anglo-Irish literature. What, for instance, besides birth and the use of local settings makes Yeats an Irish poet?*

William Butler Yeats as an Irish Poet

Williams Butler Yeats's Anglo-Irish background places him in a sensitive situation between the traditional Irish and the Anglo-Irish. He has become Anglicized like the rest of Irish traditionalists have been forced to do by the British invaders. Like many other Irish citizens, he wants to break them away from the British influence and bring the culture back to its roots and pure Irish traditions. Yeats's focus is on changing the literature of the country by taking it away from the propaganda as well as reshaping the country's mythological values. His earlier works portray Ireland through a noble vision of a nationalistic culture while later on he directed his poems at identifiable people. Towards the last bits of his career, Yeats wrote more personal poetry that focused on themes of love, hatred of old age, regard for friends, and criticism of himself. William Butler Yeats is a true Irish poet by way of focusing his poetry on the concerns of the Irish citizens to keep their country's history, traditions, and pride intact, as well as refusing to submit their identity to the British colonialists.

Yeats's poetry ranging from earlier works including "To Ireland in the Coming Times" to the later "The Municipal Gallery Revisited" addresses Ireland's historical background and the patriotic poets that preceded him. Not only did the events Yeats chose to write about become historically important but he refers to the Irish culture that came before him as well. In poems like "To Ireland in the Coming Times" he recognizes the importance of continuing the nationalistic attitude of the *fili* to inspire the country away from influence and towards independence. As the poem opens Yeats immediately refers to the *fili* "Know, that I would accounted be/ True brother of a company/ That sang, to sweeten Ireland's wrong," (Lines 2-3). He is noting that he desires to be acknowledged as an Irishman who is particularly patriotic as the *fili* were. This poem's

title reinforces that Yeats is promising to stay true to Ireland through future British influence and he later hints in the poem that his work is on a deeper level than the other nationalist poets. He suggests that his poetry is different as it shies away from propaganda and is perhaps more influential than the political poetry. "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," (Lines 17-21). Yeats believed the mythological values in his poetry would be the change Ireland needed. Because of the fact that Irish mythology embodies much of the country's history and traditions, interest in the mystical includes knowledge of Ireland's background. He is a poet like the other figures mentioned in the second stanza; however, he stays closer to Irish history by not isolating his poetry to factual political ideas. Instead, his poetry involves the mythological cycles that hold the many country's values and the Irish identity.

Focus on the mythological cycles is also seen in "The Second Coming". Here Yeats builds a sense of chaos as is believed to occur near the end of one cycle in history and the beginning of another one. "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;/ Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world/...The best lack all conviction, while the worst/ Are full of passionate intensity," (Lines 3-4, 7-8). Yeats is comparing the apocalyptic end predicted in the Christian Bible with the end of a cycle in Ireland that is occurring during the chaos of the Anglo-Irish conflict. Although this poem seems to be addressing the future more than the past, the idea of history is deeply embedded in the reference to Irish mythology. It is contrasted with the historical beliefs of Christianity that appeared in Ireland after the beginning of the British colonialism. "The Second Coming" that is

mentioned in the second stanza, as well as the title, is referring to Christ's return to earth; which is a belief many Irish were influenced to convert to during the Anglo-Irish conflicts. Therefore, the content of the poem being both mythological and Christian refers back to the country's history before the British invasion when mythology still recorded Irish traditions.

Later in life Yeats's poetry moves to a more personal history in "The Municipal Gallery Revisited." Here he notes his friendships with some of Ireland's historical figures. People that were important in his time and now important in Irish history, Yeats was honored to call friends such as John Synge and, of course, Lady Gregory. In section IV Yeats mentions the names of his important friends and includes himself as one who grew strength out of keeping rooted in Ireland's soil. "John Synge, I and Augusta Gregory, thought/ All that we did, all that we said or sang Must come from contact with the soil, from that/ Contact everything Antaeus-like grew strong," (Lines 41-44). He respects these people because of their devotion to Irish traditions. Yeats is understanding that it is the people that make his culture and he was lucky enough to have known some of the most loyal and respectable Irish which he considers to be success. "Ireland's history in their lineaments trace;/ Think where man's glory most begins and ends,/ And say my glory was I had such friends," (Lines 53-55). However, it is in the beginning of the poem where it says it all. In the second section Yeats mentions that the historically true Ireland of his past is one that no longer exists anymore due to the British colonialism and the disappointing Irish who submitted their identity and allowed themselves to become Anglicized. This poem does not refer to particular historical events or beliefs but rather acknowledges the history by observing the lack

thereof. "The Municipal Gallery Revisited" is simply an elderly man experiencing nostalgia not only for the people he's lost but for the culture he has witnessed wither away. " 'This is not,' I say,/ 'The dead Ireland of my youth, but an Ireland/ The poets have imagined, terrible and gay,'" (Lines 10-12). He refers to the older poets, possibly the *fili* and determines that Ireland had become what they predicted it would become if the Irish citizens were to forget their heritage and traditions. In each of these poems, as well as many others, Yeats establishes his loyalty to Ireland and tirelessly reminds his country of its history and traditions that are not meant to be forgotten by the influence of the British colonialists' politics, religion, etc.,.

In "September 1913," "Parnell's Funeral," and "Easter 1916" Yeats draws away from the history and traditions of Ireland and toward the pride and identity of the Irish people. Each of these poems look at what defines a true citizen of Ireland and observes the reactions of the 'modern' day nationalists. "September 1913" is meant to be considered during 1913 before there was any real organized rebellion against the British. The repeated phrase "Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,/ It's with O' Leary in the grave," is the self-explanatory meaning of the entire poem. Yeats's point by mentioning John O' Leary's death is to further reveal the loss of dedicated Irishmen. According to this poem there was no longer any remaining citizens purely dedicated to Ireland's independence, hence referring to romantic Ireland's 'death'. Instead, the newer nationalists are conflicted between selflessly serving their country and making money for themselves while viewing the older nationalists as extremists. "You'd cry 'Some woman's yellow hair/ Has maddened every mother's son':/ They weighed so lightly what they gave," (Lines 28-30). Here the newer nationalists feelings that the older nationalists

gave too much for a futile gesture. It is satire against those feelings as Yeats is actually honoring the older nationalists as true Irish nationalists who fought for their country without selfish desire. Therefore, "September 1913" is simply a glimpse at the beginning of the loss of the citizen's devotion to Ireland.

"Parnell's Funeral" includes a grave like "September 1913" but focuses on the leadership in Ireland. With Charles Parnell's death, Yeats predicts the beginning of a downhill slope in Ireland's politics. In the second stanza Yeats introduces the idea of Ireland betraying her people "A woman, and an arrow on a string;/ A pierced boy, image of a star laid low./ That woman, the Great Mother imaging,/ Cut out his heart," (Lines 11-14). Because of some citizens' lack of support for Parnell and the Irish were destroying the possibility for independence from the inside. Yeats attacks the nationalists for their lack of building a better leadership. Up until 1930, Parnell was the closest politician to liberating Ireland. And although the nationalists wanted independence for their country they did not have the heroic character or wisdom to partake in Parnell's party. "Had de Valera eaten parnell's heart/ No loose-lipped demagogue had won the day./ No civil rancour torn the land apart," (Lines 33-35). In the second section here Yeats is providing the image of a sacrificial transfer of character by eating Parnell's heart. With this image he is suggesting that there would have been strong leadership in Ireland had the nationalists realized Parnell was their best bet to achieving Ireland's independence. Through "Parnell's Funeral" Yeats exposes the Irish nationalists' mistake of not supporting the leadership that would have led them to independence.

Finally, in "Easter 1916" Yeats illustrates the wrong way for Irish nationalists to attempt to restore their identity and country's independence. Yeats acknowledges that

the desires of the revolutionaries are valid in that they want to free Ireland. Also, that their desires are important to awakening the Irish citizens who began to grow comfortable being bossed by England. "Hearts with one purpose alone/ Through summer and winter seem/ Enchanted to a stone./ To trouble a living stream," (Lines 40-43). Their purpose is a desire that is shared by the rest of Ireland but too often ignored by many who are allowing themselves to become Anglicized. The 'stone' refers to the revolutionaries' dedication to Ireland's independence that disrupts the people who gave up on fighting for their true Irish identity. However, Yeats analyzes the actions of the revolutionaries as making a terrible mess. In lines 56 through 58 he explains that the rebellious, although sacrificial and honorable, left heavy consequences by confusing and embarrassing the Irish citizens. "Too long a sacrifice/ Can make a stone of the heart./ O when may it suffice." The stone represents the consequences while the question highlights whether it was worth it for them to die. "Easter 1916" takes one event and analyzes its attempt to regain Irish identity and independence. "Easter 1916," "Parnell's Funeral," and "September 1913" each took a close look at Irish identity and the pride that encouraged the nationalists to fight for independence.

Each of Yeats's works mentioned are poems that value the true Irish culture including the mythology, history, and distinct Irish identity. By focusing on Ireland's culture and analyzing the influence the British colonialists have had on it William Butler Yeats is a true Irish poet.