

ISSN 2347 - 503X

Research Chronicler

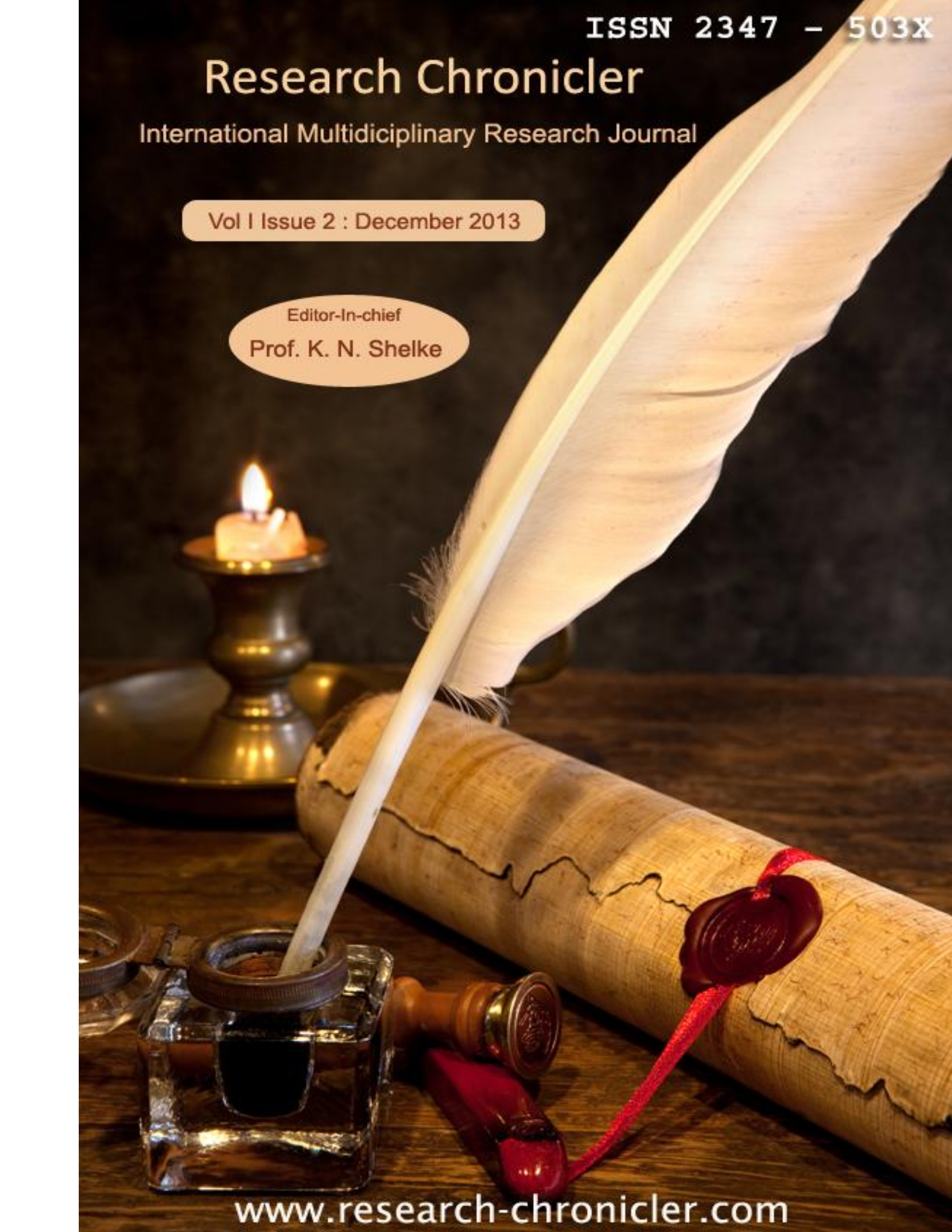
International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

Vol I Issue 2 : December 2013

Editor-In-chief

Prof. K. N. Shelke

www.research-chronicler.com

A detailed photograph of a quill pen resting on a scroll of parchment. The quill is white and has a dark tip. The scroll is made of aged, yellowish parchment and is tied with a red ribbon. A red wax seal is visible on the scroll. In the background, there is a lit candle in a brass holder and a glass inkwell. The scene is set on a wooden surface.

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A peer-reviewed refereed and indexed international multidisciplinary research journal

Volume I Issue II: December – 2013

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W.B. Yeats: Transition from Romanticism to Modernism

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ABSTRACT

W. B Yeats' literary career is marked by double phases of literary elegances – Romanticism and Modernism. Romantic Impulse is conspicuous at the early stage but as his poetry evolves the note of modernism begins to intrude in his writing. Yeats' connection with the changing face of literary culture in the early twentieth century led him to pick up some of the styles and conventions of the modernist poets who experimented with new verse from reflecting the turbulence of the world. Yeats was influenced by the contemporary society and this influences caused his poetry to fulfill the demand of his Age. Although he never abandoned the verse forms that provided the sounds and rhythms of his earlier poetry. There is still a noticeable shift in style and tone over the course of his career. Yeats' response to the chaotic condition of society was that of contempt but in the deliverance of his view point, he intrinsically gets connected in the emergence modernism in English Literature.

Key Words: Romanticism, modernism, emotional intensity, encounter with reality, poetic evolution.

Introduction

W.B Yeats stipulates the momentous exploration of 20th century English Literature arousing a profound discourse of modernist thought that dominate English poetry for at least a whole generation it proceeds. His trimmings of the elegant form proliferates its grand eminence in his late forties while his writings before the close of the old century indicate his early interest and romantic inclination. His early attachment to the myths and legends of the romantic Ireland, he was afterwards to declare 'dead and gone'. When he began publishing poetry in the 1880, he followed the conventions

of romantic style, focusing on love, longing and loss and Irish myths. His later poetry represents the essence of modernism which is the outcome of his growing experiences and intellectual abstractness. The topical and the intellectual, the lively and the difficult are the general effect of modernist work and their reasons must be sought in the causes for such effect. In Yeats such effect emerges out from the fusion of new and old interpreting one by other, revealing the continuity of human experiences, defining contemporaneity and past. The constitution of a poem doesn't depend on a particular belief. It can be imbued with belief to organize experience in to meaning, as poetry is the manifesto of significant experiences. Yeats'

poetic evolution from Romanticism to Modernism doesn't occur suddenly. Yeats had been changing his poetic style from its early gentle romanticism towards something more dramatic. The idea of an integrated and integrative poetry in which 'blood, imagination, intellect' work together to express 'the whole man' becomes central to Yeats. Yeats' intense consciousness to mysticism and the occult guided him to explore spiritually and philosophically complex subjects. His frustrated romantic relationship with Maud Gonne caused the starry-eyed romantic idealism of his early work to become more knowing and cynical. Yeats was also deeply affiliated and was interacting with his native traditions being a poet of a turbulently nationalist Ireland. Being closely connected to nationalist political causes, he articulates the experiences, the aspirations and the restorative vision of people, suffering under the dominion of an offshore power. As a result Yeats shifted his focus from myth and folklore to contemporary politics often linking the two to make potent statements that reflected political agitation and turbulence in Ireland and abroad. The most important factor is the changing face of the literary culture which led him to embrace the 20th century values of culture and literary conventions. A further influence on Yeats was that of the French symbolist Baudelaire, Mallarme Verlaine. He was also strongly influenced by Blake whose metaphysical elements and symbolism continued to work to the end in his poetry.

Yeats' idea of Romanticism and Modernism

Until about 1912, Yeats repeatedly explored the vein that made him acceptable to many who found in his poetry, the romantic pensiveness and gentle melancholy, the homely nature, imagery, the dreams, the simple ballads which constituted

the spirit and substance of Yeats' verse, as a pleasing and unexacting literary exercise. In *Crossways* (1889) there were such still popular pieces as 'The Song of the Child', 'Down by the Sally gardens'. In the *Rose* (1893) 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree', 'When You are old', 'The Ballad of Father Gilligan', 'The Wind among the Reeds' (1899), 'The Song of Wandering Aengus', 'The Cap and Bells', 'He wishes for the Cloth of Heaven', 'The Green Helmet', and other poems was published in 1910 which marks a significant development of the early works.

In *Responsibilities* (1914) appeared two poems that were crucial in his development. The September 1915, is referred to with its refrain to the several stanzas:

'Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,
It's with O'Leary in the grave.'

and the last but one poem in the volume 'A Coat'

'I made my song a coat
Covered with embroideries
Out of old mythologies
From heel to throat
But the fools caught it
Wore it in the world's eyes'

The deliberate shedding of Yeats of the embroidered coat of verse is particularly important in its chronological place for, as a manifesto of new technique, it predominates the literary culture for a whole generation. The development of Yeats style with greater dramatic force was encouraged by Ezra Pound who had come to England in 1908. In

developing more modern style Pound's influence was acted as an effective force on him.

Yeats poetic contemplation germinated in the 19th century when the movement of Romanticism touched the highest magnitude and he continued his literary practice until the middle of 20th century when the essence of modernism was widely spread over the literary horizon. So Yeats is the man whose poetic standpoint was that of a bridge between the two distinctive literary ages. In the book 'The last Romantics' Hough asserts by mentioning what William B. Yeats declared. "We were the last Romantics" whenever we go to characterize Yeats poetry, we notice that his declaration of himself as a romantic is in fact comes out as heroic stance in the fact of filthy modern tide in the crass of materialism and in the flux of modernism. Again we find him creating his own poetic philosophy, based on his own peculiar occult aesthetic notion. In this phase the essence or mood is something beyond the writers self that overcoming his personality express itself in the purity of lyrical poem.

The critical perspective through which Yeats observes the self at all stages of his life become more enigmatic for his continual obsession with magic, and mysticism which reveals him as an unsatisfactory romantic. Yeats's idea of that mysticism and magic is perhaps that from sharing from Blake who believed in the reality of vision and communicating with symbolic essences. Yeats saw himself align with the Romantics and we also find a good evidence to explore him as such one. Yeats Romanticism arouse a contradictory analysis as he studied Coleridge, Shelly and Wordsworth in totally different way than the modern readers as according to him Shelly, Blake, Keats, Coleridge believed in varying degrees in magic and neo-platonic universe. As a poet is quiet free in thinking, though he considers himself as a last

romantic, however he appears as a modern literary figure too.

In Yeats the fact of modernism comes consciously or subconsciously when he incorporates the methods and themes of modernism in order to comprehend in himself the whole round of art. Yeats' birth was in 1865, which was a less productive decade for English writers, but if we exceed English literature, we notice that 1865s the birth years of a number of important modernists or precursors of Modernism, such as Claude Debussy, Gustav Klimt, Richard Strauss, Vassily Kandinsky and Henry Matisse. All of them were profoundly influenced by the aesthetic of symbolism- the artistic movement that leads most directly into Modernism. Charles Baudelaire accounts of the origin of modernism in 'The Painter of Modern life' (1864) gave such prestige to the term modern. If through modernism we understand the art of fugitive urban Junk-posters for last week's cabaret singers ungluing in the rain, orange peels flushing into the sewers – Yeats is the least modernist of poet. Most of the modernists were at home in cities and in the novels of James Joyce or Virginia Woolf we hardly find any major character who feels comfortable in the midst of mud and clay. About Yeats we explore that though he passed most of the time of his life in Dublin or London, he regarded modern city as unnatural and counterproductive to the poetic process and his attitude was that of 'contempt'. He denotes the houses in Dublin as 'grey' in Easter 16 and his description of 'no country for old men' in 'Sailing to Byzantium' reinforces the idea of an inhuman atmosphere. Yeats' desire to seek shelter in the ancient city of Byzantium demonstrates his retrospective attitude. Again and again he remembers the art and sculpture of the Byzantian city. He is alarmed with the problem of old age, he feels miserable thinking about the unfitness of aged being. In his desire

to fly in the glorious traditional society, he has subconsciously revealed two aspects of his writing – in his tendency to escape he establishes him as a romantic and in his abhorrence in modern society, he establishes the modern view point of an artist. Yeats finds comfort in symbols taken from the traditional stock of conventions than with the symbols drawn from modern life. Yeats denotes modern poetry as taking ‘all out of shape’. His reflection of the modern world embedded him more deeply with modernism. As deeply Yeats casts himself as the enemy of modernism, so strongly he becomes an integral part of modern movement. While Eliot condemns Romanticism as ‘fragmentary, immature, chaotic’ Yeats boldly asserts himself as one of the last romantics in the introduction to ‘The Oxford Book of Modern Verse (1936). The elderly Yeats sums up his response to contemporary poetry as writhe, a seethe, a degenerate mess. Yeats despises the absence of metaphor, the dead plod, in advanced recent poetry: he even offers a little caricature of a modernist poem. But the features of modernist poetry get flourished in the castle of his poetry. Vulgar diction darts to intrude in the late 1930s and we also find irregular line lengths.

“Swear by what the sages spoke

Round the Mareotic Lake

That the Witch of Atlas knew,

Spoke and set the cocks a-crow”.

(Under Ben Bulben)

From Yeats’ point of view and also from the symbolist point of view- the objective or realistic elements exists only as a sort of colorful wrapping paper that half disguises, half reveals, Yeats’ works like those of all the symbolists are full of the most up to date references though the contemporaneity is sometimes occluded.

A poet is quite free in thinking and Yeats was encouraged to develop an attitude of

initiative belief with no degree of consistency, but only with emotional intensity. A poet has the freedom to say in the eve of the day that he believes in marriage and at the end of the day that he no longer believes in it; in the morning he believes in God, in the evening he does not believe in God. The crucial matter is not in keeping the mental consistency but in preserving integrity of soul. Belief is the matter of mood a style of thought. Yeats conviction is that, belief is self confirming. In a letter of 1899 he asserted “Whatever we build in the imagination, will accomplish itself in the circumstance of our lives. Yeats in his poetic contemplation particularly at the youth was obsessed by those psychic phenomenons that are invoked by combined mystical powers of a group of adherents. In ‘The Trembling of the Veil’ Yeats insisted that “as life goes, we discover that certain thoughts sustain us in defeat, and in these thoughts, tested by passion that we call convictions”. The note of fatalism is apparent in this assertion, but for Yeats beliefs, convictions are of little use as they buoy the spirit when the body or the intellect is beaten. In “Vacillation” he counsels:

“Test every work of intellect or faith

And everything that your own hands have wrought

And call those works extravagance of breath

That are not suited for such man come”.

Characteristics of Romanticism and Modernism

Before exploring Romantic and Modernist notes in Yeats and finding out his evolution, we should have a glimpse of the

fundamental aspects of Romanticism and Modernism. The aspects of romantics are subjectivity, imagination, emotion, love for art and beauty, nostalgia, escapism, idealism, symbolism, mysticism, art for art's sake etc. Most of all of these salient features of romanticism are prevalent in W.B. Yeats' earlier poems as well as in some of his later poems of matured age. On the other hand, the term 'modernism' describes both a set of cultural tendencies and an array of associated cultural movements, originally arising from wide-scale and far-reaching changes to western society in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The term encompasses the activities and output of those who felt the 'traditional' forms of art, architecture, literature, religious faith, social organization and daily life were becoming outdated in the new economic, social and political conditions of an emerging fully industrialized world. The thematic characteristics of modernism are frustration, disorder, disillusionment, alienation, realistic portrayal of social meanings, spiritual loneliness, objection of traditional thoughts etc. The writers brought change in writing through the use of colloquial language, images and symbols, through using language in a very self-conscious way. Yeats' writings of the matured period greatly reflect the tone of modernism. He uses myth, symbolism, juxtaposition, colloquial language and literary allusions as a device to express the anxiety of modernity.

Reflection of Romanticism

Yeats' idea of Romanticism is coloured with his love for nature and countryside which can be traced out in his early lyrics.

Being dissatisfied and bored with the din and bustle of mechanical society and urban civilization, Yeats' romantic mind wanted to go back to the lap of Mother Nature and to the fairy land of fantasy which is free from sick hurry fret and fever. This tendency to return to Nature and dreamland is expressed in his early poems. In 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree', we find him saying:

"I will arise and go now, and go to
Innisfree,

And a small cabin build there, of clay
and wattles made

Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive
for the honey-bee

And live alone in the bee-land glade."

Self-revelation is another romantic trait in Yeats' poetry. Like Romantics he also wrote deeply personal poetry revealing his spirit, thoughts, feelings and so on. In 'The Tower' he is able to sublimate his loss of Maund Gonne. In his words:

"Does the imagination dwell the most
Upon a woman won or woman lost".

Yeats has a strong love for mythology which is both a modern and romantic trait. Like Keats, he was deeply in love with mythology. Many of his poems frequently refer to Helen of Troy, Leda, Zeus, Aphrodite and Byzantium. Yeats was very much sensitive with the disappearance of the good things. He delivers a kind of melancholic tone when his heart is poured with sadness. He says in 'The Wild Swans at Coole' and feels himself defeated:

"I have looked upon those brilliant creatures
And now my heart is sore."

Yeats' mind undergoes nostalgia for the old Ireland, Maud Gonne and his past. He has also used rich imagery in his poetry. He was never fully liberated from the 19th century romanticism despite his denial of romantic diction and romantic imagery. In his early poems, he uses the vague and beautiful images of flowers, stars, birds and mythical figures to escape from the ugliness of his age. But in later poetry he uses the realistic images like the image of the rough beast, as Yeats utters:

“... a Vast Image out of Spiritus Munde
Troubles my sight.”

Reflection of Modernism

As poetry is the expression of poet's own self, much of Yeats eloquence in championing belief is directed to himself. Along with manifesting his thought, the confusion, conflict and uncertainty that the poet has reflected in his writing bears the testimony of his keen awareness about the contemporary civilization. Yeats has speculated the prospect of modern society. He could not limit his writing within the Romantic note, declaring his journey through

Mysticism and occult, his voice in poetry uncover immense, visionary world of prophecy, with torment and delight. Yeats vision of the future gets a striking penetration in his 1919 poem. 'The Second coming' According to the poet the civilization is reaching the end of a historical cycle and the passage into another would be full of violence, division and uncertainty. The poet asserts:

“Turning and turning in the widening gyre

the falcon cannot hear the falconer,
things fall apart the centre cannot hold.”

With a deep insight, Yeats observes that the entire globe is getting disrupted and an incessant 'turning and turning' is going on and we are left with an anxious uncertainty and suspended with tension. But as from every kind of apocalyptic action and barbaric destruction, there emerges something new. The poet also hears the rebirth of a civilization. In poet's words:

“And what rough beast, its hour come round at last
Slouches towards Bethelhem to be born?”

When Yeats heart yearned for unity, his thought resisted being hammered together. The greater the tension, the greater the passion a poet can develop in his attempt to bridge the gulf. Conflict is prevailing in every heart and the individual feels the stirring of mind to better down and get power from this fighting. Yeats feels presence of self and antiself in human personality. For Yeats the fundamental split within each individual is that, a split between spirit and intellect which divides from the self its own true nature and the individual unfulfilled and unhappy. Whenever the individual ascertains the harmony inside his own being than he gets touch of real tranquility and only the revelation of truth brings the harmony of thought. There was a misty uncertainty in the poets mind in his earlier poetic stage. His idea was not fixed about what he was seeking. There were only poignant unanswered questions:

“Who will drive with Fergus now,
And pierce the deep woods woven shade”
And dance upon the level shore?”

Yeats was torned with the splits within himself. He was a believer as well as a skeptic. Yeats presents before us a human world that is full of arresting beauty and jarring turmoil. He reminds us that our existence is survived in a time of great error and possibility. It is the wave of modernism, the flow of which is formulating and influencing the pattern of life. Yeats thinks that abstract reasoning that is divorced from imagination, creates a kind of danger. Only the power of imagination helps to observe a matter deeply and earnestly. Imagination, myth, symbol can act in more effective way to make people understand the underlying meanings of everyday experiences. Full of fantasies of a better world, the young Yeats struggled to accept regular life on earth and sought desperately to find a way into other dimensions of space and time. He has pictured an alluring other worldly Kingdom in 'the stolen child' that calls us from the frustrations of everyday life to the eerie phantasm of the faery dance.

The poet boldly asserts:

"While the world is full of troubles and is come away,

O human child! to the waters and the wild

With a faery, hand in hand

For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand."

Evolution

Yeats wanted poetry to engage the full complexity of life but only in so far as the individual poet's imagination had direct access to experience or thought and only in so far as those materials were transformed by the energy of artistic articulation. He was from first to last a poet who tried to

transform the local concerns of his own life by embodying them in the resonantly universal language of his poems. Yeats' friendship with Ezra Pound was of great importance in the development of his style towards greater tauntness and dramatic force. Pound had come to England in 1908 and soon established himself in literary London as a powerful influence for change, advocating the 'The New' in poetry, fiction, painting, sculpture and music. Yeats saw a good deal of him in 1912 and Pound became his unofficial secretary for a while. In encouraging Yeats to develop a more modern style, Pound was also responsible for introducing him in 1915 to the Japanese Noh plays. Yeats' later poems are full with social and political elements and his tension and conflict of mind century are more apparent in these poems. Yeats acknowledged the difficult contradictions that are prevailing in modern life. He admits the fact that "confusion fell upon our thought."

Who are living in an unhappy state. The poet's combative voice is heard prominently in "The Green Helmet and other poems" (1910) which is more mature and capable of taking on a symbolist poet's great enemies: modern society and modern history. This small collection of satirical play and short poems marks a significant development from the early work and anticipates the maturity of the poems in 'The Tower' and 'The Winding Stair'. In the early poems the occult, Irish faerylore and Celtic mythology provided symbols, narratives and characters for an Ireland of the imagination. In 'The Green Helmet' these are replaced by contemporary municipal politics, the theatre

and a modern urban public. Ireland is now characterized as a blind, bitter land and as a fool-driven land. A combative power enters in the language. It is clear from the poems that Yeats felt himself to be drawn into spirited public and poetic defense of his cultural values and poetic ideals, which were evidently no longer commensurate with those of modern Ireland. The opposition between the poet and modern world, however much it appears in these poems to result only in eloquent disillusion or 'a withering into the truth' and this fact was to become supremely important in his later work. Many of the poems in 'Responsibility' are occasional where the subjects are society, the market place and even the contemporary municipal politics.

Yeats' poetry unhesitatingly explore his deep consciousness to Irish nationalism and politics. As poetry is the vehicle to deliver the individual thought to the people, Yeats used his writings as a tool to comment on Irish politics and the home rule movement and to educate and inform people about Irish history and culture. As he became increasingly involved with nationalist politics, his poems took on a patriotic tone. The transformation of Yeats to modernism was greatly influenced by his deep concern on Irish politics.

The Irish rebellion moved him greatly where five hundred people were killed. It changed the Irish public life irrevocably giving the birth of 'a terrible beauty' Yeats feelings about the rebellion and its consequences were equivocal. He wrote in a letter that he had no idea that any public event could move him so deeply. It did so

because it brought into explosive contact with reality. The idea of individualism, which is introduced by Romanticism, gets an improved and understandable sense with modernism. Though the Romantics isolate the individual self from the society, the modernists celebrate the individual self that is driven by outside factors of society. Yeats who kept Romanticism as his chief ideal could not cast him away from his society and contemporary political condition. He made the use of his talent as a good source of revolutionary spirit to comment on the political problems of Ireland and to give information about Irish culture. Mostly he commented on cultural crisis and conflicts by using images of war, disorder and choose in his works. The poem 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen' was prompted by incidents which occurred during the fighting between Irish Republican Army and the British forces combined with the Irish police force in 1919. Yeats evokes the unexpected brutality of war, destruction of ancient Athen's sacred olive and its after effects to contemporary Ireland.

Yeats as a beholder of contemporary civilization perceived that the natural beauty is getting disparaged with rapid industrialization. He associates his metamorphosis from romanticism to modernism to the consequence of industrialization such as the loss of natural beauty, loneliness and fragmentation. The changing tone of Yeats is an incursion on the hebetudes and barrenness of modern civilization. The strong abhorrence to the abysmal state, however is the dolorous outburst of poets thought and imagination. Romanticism where there is the consolation

through hope has given place to unhappy, pessimistic mood of modernism and in the poem 'A Prayer for My Daughter' the poet's anxiety and pessimistic tone are grounded with minute accuracy.

"Once more the storm is howling, and half hid
Under this cradle-hood and coverlid
My child sleeps on. There is no obstacle
But Gregory's Wood and one bare hill
Whereby the haystack and roof-levelling wind,
Bred on the Atlantic, can be stayed;
And for an hour I have walked and prayed
Because of the great gloom that is in my mind."

This poem is a petition and a declaration of Yeats sacred values for a child, born in the time of war. The presence of a sleeping child and the poet in praying condition, are found here. Yeats has made a conscious effort in describing the growth of turmoil, not from interest but from tension. As the central concern of writing is to describe, evoke and generally recreate the development of author's experience, the deliberative thought and mood of the poet get modified from the mood of discomfort. Though he states himself as last romantic, but yet he was in many ways the first modernist. Because of the discomfiture of war, revolution and violence in Ireland, the optimistic point of view of Romanticism was substituted by the pessimistic point of view of modernism. Romanticism is denoted here as optimism because it gives importance on emotion rather than reason, so there is a way to take shelter in the lap of something optimistic. Where modernism is encircled basing on human despair.

As modernism has brought the problem of disintegration of established systems and absolutes there is the sense of separated or alienated state from the whole. In the poem *Sailing to Byzantium* the old man observes

himself as isolated from the younger generation and this makes him feel fragmented. Solitariness is always considered as fragment by the modern writers who also think that man is unable to create a relationship with others because he is naturally asocial. This concept does not refer to the Romantic alienation of man but a kind of alienation which a man feels being captured in the materialistic society. While the world is getting disorganized because of social, political, economic and cultural problems, there is a tend to challenge the existing system with the hope of creating a new one, which would fulfill the needs and expectations of the people and be away from the unpleasantness of the real life shaped by the capitalist materialist distortion. Modernist Critic. T.S. Eliot remarks that "The past should be altered by the present as much as present is directed by the past". Eliot's claim here signifies that what an individual has experienced can be changed by his/her present experience and the decisions of the present are always affected by the past experiences. Keats as a Romantic poet reflects his imagination being influenced not only by his present external effects but also by his understanding of a better past as he conceives of the urn. In 'Sailing to Byzantium' the poet's imagination is frequently influenced by the past and there is the tendency to escape the present by flying to the past. 'Sailing' in this little word the note of escapism is prevalent. The celebration of Greek art and culture, the references of the nature, the old man's desire to be independent and immortal bird all this things bear the romantic quality and it is noticed that the present experience of the

poet regarding his surrounding environment is creating a deep gloom in his mind whenever he compares it with the glorious past. The poet sings:

“I have sailed the seas and comes
 To the holy city of Byzantium
 O sages standing in God’s holy fire.

 Come from the holy fire

 To sing

 Of what is past or passing or to come.”

Conclusion

Yeats is well aware of the socio-economic changes of his time. The days of the great glory were over. In the poem “Blood and the Moon” we find him questioning whether modern nations are like the tower, half dead at the top. He contemplates the effect of power – and death and regards wisdom as the property of the dead. Perceiving actual and imagined reality give the poet access to creative power and create an arena with in which the encountering dispositions are drawn up. The civilization entered into a new era, so enhanced awareness became a compensation for the daily ‘realities’ of an increasingly complex life while ideas were still based upon feeling. Though facts of modernism come out in his later writing, there is no doubt that Yeats felt more comfort in declaring himself as a Romantic when he retrospectively reasserted his Romanticism as a heroic stance in the filthy wave of modernism. In a letter written to Dorothy Wellesley in 1936, He says:

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“Now that I have had all my Anthology in galley proof. I am astonished at the greatness of much of the poetry & at its sadness. Most of the ‘moderns’ - Auden, Spender etc seem thin beside the more sensuous work of the ‘romantics’.

The changes of Yeats from earlier stage to later reflect his understanding and matured experiences of the world. The poetic process we might say, thrives on a conflation, or confusion of the actual world and the world of imagination; the creation of an imaginary world becomes an act not only of artistic but of real worth; it empowers the poet and absolves from the pain of the actual. Yeats transition from Romanticism to Modernism has occurred due to his encounter with reality. The growing liveliness of his mind created an increasing simplicity and eloquence of poetry that make the framework of modern poetry with the inter play of poetic emotion. Early Yeats of the Celtic Twilight, embroidered and colored by romantic view of love, appears as a magnanimous and acquires the tribute of dominant modernist whose poetry command universal admiration and make the way of a new literary age.

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