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THE MODERNIST TRANSFORMATION OF POETIC DRAMA IN THE DRAMATURGY OF W.B. YEATS

This article examines the special role of poetic drama in modern literary history, particularly during the transition from late 19th-century symbolism to 20th-century modernism, with a primary focus on the dramaturgy of W. B. Yeats. Poetic drama is defined as a theatrical form characterized by rhythmic language, symbolic imagery, and ritualized stage movement. Within this framework, Yeats emerges as a central figure who sought not only to revive but also to fundamentally reimagine poetic drama in response to the limitations of realistic and naturalistic theater.

Rejecting the dominant conventions of social realism, Yeats criticized modern drama for its overreliance on everyday language and topical issues, which, in his view, reduced theater to a form of journalism. In contrast, he advocated a stylized, symbolic, and elevated poetic language capable of expressing emotional and metaphysical truths inaccessible to prose drama. His plays are therefore best understood as symbolic-ritual dramas that aim to restore a sense of transcendence, order, and collective meaning inherent in modern industrial and secular society.

The article places Yeats within the broader context of the Irish Literary Revival, highlighting his collaborations with figures such as Lady Gregory and Douglas Hyde, as well as his involvement in the founding of the Abbey Theatre. This movement sought to create a distinctive Irish national theatre rooted in mythology, folklore, and cultural memory, rather than imitating English theatrical models. Yeats's engagement with Irish identity, despite his Anglo-Irish background, reflects a deliberate desire to use theatre as a vehicle for cultural renewal and national self-awareness.

A key aspect of Yeats's dramaturgy is the influence of non-Western traditions, particularly Japanese Noh theatre. From Noh theater, Yeats adopted elements such as minimalist scenography, the integration of music and movement, the use of masks, and a focus on a single turning point in the protagonist's life. These characteristics contributed to the development of a nonlinear, episodic dramatic structure in which external action is minimized, emphasizing internal, psychological, and spiritual transformation.

Article highlights Yeats's consistent use of archetypal narrative patterns, often built around motifs such as encounter, trial, and transformation. In many of his plays, the plot unfolds not through a sequence of cause-and-effect events, but instead focuses on a critical moment of crisis or revelation in the protagonist's life. This structural approach is consistent with modernist trends identified by theorists such as Peter Shondi, who has noted the erosion of traditional dramatic form and the weakening of cause-and-effect relationships in contemporary drama.

Moreover, the recurring use of mythological and folkloric material in Yeats's work is interpreted through the lens of Jungian archetypes and Eliade's concept of mythic repetition. These concepts help explain the persistence of symbolic structures across plays, despite differences in theme and setting. Thus, Yeats's dramaturgy operates on both a national and universal level, combining Irish cultural specificity with broader metaphysical concerns.

Ultimately, the article argues that Yeats's poetic drama represents an alternative path in modernist theatre – one that prioritizes ritual, symbolism, and spiritual exploration over realism and narrative coherence. His work reimagines the relationship between poetry and theatre, offering a model in which drama becomes a vehicle for exploring the deepest layers of human existence and cultural identity.

Key words: *myth and folklore, poetic drama, Irish literary revival, symbolism, modernist drama.*

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МОДЕРНІСТСЬКА ТРАНСФОРМАЦІЯ ПОЕТИЧНОЇ ДРАМИ У ДРАМАТУРГІЇ В. Б. ЙЄЙТСА

У цій статті розглядається особлива роль поетичної драми в сучасній історії літератури, зокрема під час переходу від символізму кінця 19 століття до модернізму 20 століття, з головною увагою до драматургії Вільяма Б. Єйтса. Поетична драма визначається як театральна форма, що характеризується ритмічною мовою, символічними образами та ритуалізованим сценічним рухом. У цих рамках Єйтс постає як центральна фігура,

яка прагнула не лише відродити, а й фундаментально переосмислити поетичну драму у відповідь на обмеження реалістичного та натуралістичного театру.

Відкидаючи домінуючі конвенції соціального реалізму, Єйтс критикував сучасну драму за її надмірну залежність від повсякденної мови та актуальних питань, що, на його думку, зводило театр до форми журналістики. На противагу цьому, він виступав за стилізовану, символічну та піднесену поетичну мову, здатну виражати емоційні та метафізичні істини, недоступні для прозової драми. Тому його п'єси найкраще розуміти як символічно-ритуальні драми, що мають на меті відновити відчуття трансцендентності, порядку та колективного сенсу, властивого сучасному індустріальному та світському суспільству.

У статті розглядається творчість Єйтса в ширшому контексті Ірландського літературного відродження, підкреслюючи його співпрацю з такими діячами, як леді Грегорі та Дуглас Гайд, а також його участь у заснуванні театру «Абатство». Цей рух прагнув створити самобутній ірландський національний театр, що коріниться в міфології, фольклорі та культурній пам'яті, а не наслідує англійські театральні моделі. Залучення Єйтса до ірландської ідентичності, незважаючи на його англо-ірландське походження, відображає свідоме бажання використовувати театр як засіб культурного оновлення та національної самосвідомості.

Ключовим аспектом драматургії Єйтса є вплив незахідних традицій, зокрема японського театру Но. З театру Но Єйтс запозичив такі елементи, як мінімалістична сценографія, інтеграція музики та руху, використання масок та зосередження на одному поворотному моменті в житті головного героя. Ці характеристики сприяли розвитку нелінійної, епізодичної драматичної структури, в якій зовнішня дія мінімізована, підкреслюючи внутрішню, психологічну та духовну трансформацію.

У статті висвітлено послідовне використання Єйтсом архетипних наративних моделей, часто побудованих навколо таких мотивів, як зустріч, випробування та трансформація. У багатьох його п'єсах сюжет розгортається не через послідовність причинно-наслідкових подій, а натомість зосереджується на критичному моменті кризи чи одкровенні в житті головного героя. Такий структурний підхід узгоджується з модерністськими тенденціями, визначеними такими теоретиками, як Пітер Шонді, який відзначив ерозію традиційної драматичної форми та ослаблення причинно-наслідкових зв'язків у сучасній драматургії.

Більше того, повторюване використання міфологічного та фольклорного матеріалу у творчості Єйтса інтерпретується крізь призму юнганських архетипів та концепції міфічного повторення Еліаде. Ці концепції допомагають пояснити збереження символічних структур у п'єсах, незважаючи на відмінності в тематиці та обстановці. Таким чином, драматургія Єйтса діє як на національному, так і на універсальному рівні, поєднуючи ірландську культурну специфіку з ширшими метафізичними проблемами.

Зрештою, у статті стверджується, що поетична драма Єйтса представляє альтернативний шлях у модерністському театрі, який надає пріоритет ритуалу, символізму та духовному дослідженню над реалізмом та наративною зв'язністю. Його творчість переосмислює взаємозв'язок між поезією та театром, пропонуючи модель, в якій драма стає засобом дослідження найглибших шарів людського існування та культурної ідентичності.

Ключові слова: міф і фольклор, поетична драма, ірландське літературне відродження, символізм, модерністська драма.

Introduction. Poetic drama has occupied a unique position in the history of modern literature, especially during the transition from the symbolism of the late 19th century to the modernity of the 20th century. Poetic drama is understood as a form of theatre in which the rhythmic use of language, symbolic imagery and stage action are ritualistic. Among the writers who have attempted to revive and reform poetic drama in modern times was W.B. Yeats. Yeats's dramaturgy does not fit into either the realistic or classical drama model. His plays are more often characterized as symbolic-ritual drama. Dissatisfied with the naturalistic and commercially oriented theatre of his time, Yeats believed that drama written in verse could bring spiritual and philosophical depth to the stage. Yeats's poetic drama appears to be a sustained and intellectual attempt to redefine the relationship between poetry and theatre in modern times. He approached poetic drama from the standpoint of myth, symbolism and ritual, which stemmed from Irish cultural traditions and occult philosophy. In Yeats's vision, poetic drama was not only a technical experiment in the form of

poetry, but also a response to the crisis of modern civilization. Industrialization, secularization, and the collapse of the value system, according to Yeats, had weakened the spiritual function of art. Drama written in poetic form aimed to restore a sense of transcendence, order, and collective meaning that realistic works written in prose could not express.

As we have noted, the formation of Irish cultural consciousness led to the beginning of the Literary Revival movement, and the exceptional role of W.B. Yeats in this is undoubtedly undeniable. This movement was influenced by the mixed political upheavals that occurred as a result of the breakdown of relations with England, and Yeats's dramaturgy developed in parallel with the Literary Revival movement and the creation of the Abbey Theater. From the 1890s, Yeats believed that Ireland needed a national theater based on myth, legend, and symbolism rather than social realism. Influenced by French symbolist drama, Japanese Noh theater, and the mystical worldview he later systematized in his own work *The Meeting*, the playwright wrote plays that emphasized lyric

poetry, masks, and archetypal images. The influence of Noh theater in Yeats's dramaturgy was particularly evident in the minimal staging, musical accompaniment, and choral motifs. He viewed Noh theater as an example of ritual theater in which poetry, music, and movement became a unified form of expression. The playwright's works such as "The Countess Cathleen", "Cathleen ni Houlihan", "At the Hawk's Well", "The King of the Great Clock Tower", and "Purgatory" clearly expressed the idea that poetic drama is a ritual that can transform both the actor and the audience.

The role of Irish national consciousness in Yeats' drama

W. B. Yeats rejected the dominant naturalist theatre principles represented by playwrights such as H. Ibsen, stating that excessive preoccupation with social problems and everyday colloquialisms turned drama into journalism (Yeats, 1961: 258). In contrast, he advocated creating dramas rich in high stylistic language and symbolic action. At that time, language could express emotional and metaphysical truths, transcending the boundaries of ordinary means of expression. His early poetic dramas were based on Irish folklore and heroic legends, reflecting the conflicts between the mortal world and the literary world of the spirit. Over time, Yeats's dramatic style became more austere and concise, moving away from romantic nationalism and towards more abstract and tragic aspects of human existence.

Yeats's opposition to naturalism was also ontological in nature. In contrast to the naturalistic theatre's presentation of reality as objective and observable phenomena, Yeats's main goal was to express on stage the metaphysical layers of reality such as myth, memory and collective consciousness.

Although W.B. Yeats spoke English, he accepted the ideas of the Irish revival movement and applied them in his work. The reason for his call to the Irish people to fight for national identity, as well as his collaboration with a group of intellectuals, was to create a theatrical tradition that would serve to strengthen national consciousness in Ireland. Yeats, together with Lady Gregory, even appealed to the Ministry of Education in order to gain the support of academic circles. As a result, Ireland became "the first English-speaking country to have a national theatre funded by the state" (Pilkington, 2004: 723).

Since the role of literature as well as other factors in the formation of national identity is undeniable, Yeats was aware of the seriousness of the responsibility of Irish playwrights. He attempted to restore Irish identity by emphasizing the relationship between culture and nationalism, which led to the emergence of new considerations about the concept of nationalism

(Greene, 2000: 242).

Since playwrights such as L. Gregory, J.M. Synge, E. Martyn, who were based on national traditions, aimed to create a theater that was far from English colonialism and appropriate to Irish themes, the founders of the "Abbey Theater" sent a message to the colonial authorities: "Ireland is not a place of clowning and sentimentality, but a land faithful to ancient idealism" (Gregory, 1965: 62). The new theater tried to present a new image of the Irish people by changing the negative stereotypes that the colonialists attributed to the Irish, and Lady Gregory periodically voiced the opinion that "we are tired of false representations."

The founders of the theatre, in their notice entitled "Advice to Dramatists", stated the requirement that "a play considered suitable for staging at the Abbey Theatre should be based on the writer's personal experience or observation, or should reflect, as far as possible, views on the life of the Irish" (Gregory, 1965: 62).

As can be seen from the requirement, Irish theatre was distinguished by its educational nature, unlike other theatres. Yeats, speaking from this position, expressed the opinion that "Literature is, in my opinion, the greatest educational force in the world" (Yeats, 1962: 57-58). His interest in Irish themes stemmed from his understanding of the necessity of using the national heritage of Ireland in theatre. He wanted drama to truly express the Irish spirit, rather than become a means of national propaganda. The environment in which Yeats lived also influenced the formation of his work. According to C. Brooks, his sense of history and attachment to tradition came from his reading and deep knowledge of the works of modern historians" (Brooks, 1978: 45). The connection between theatre and the social and cultural life of Ireland is reflected in the Irish playwrights' interest in culture, language, heritage as a result of the interest in the language, it was associated with the idea of national autonomy. As a result, the ideas of the Renaissance spread in Ireland (Maxwell, 1984: 17).

Some sources note that the Irish dramaturgical movement differed from its contemporaries in Bergen and parts of London in its use of Irish legend and folklore as material for poetic drama. Drama, which was also closely associated with national movements directed against English colonialism, played a key role in promoting Irish nationalism. There were also those who opposed Irish theater, since it expressed a return to traditions and roots. In this regard, the activities of Yeats and Lady Gregory were periodically criticized. Because they emphasized the difference between the tradition attributed to the British and Protestant ruling class and the Irish. Despite the role of both thinkers

in the formation of national ideas, their nationalist ideas were criticized. This was due to their Anglo-Irish origin. As a result, their efforts were not properly appreciated and were evaluated from a more limited, colonial perspective.

Although the philosophy of the newly created theater was also criticized, the founders of the theater emphasized the importance of an independent Irish identity. Irish national drama should be very different, because the Irish nation had not been destroyed and lived with its own national moral values. A misunderstanding of the principles of the theater and the ideas of its founders actually indicated a cultural division within the Irish.

Yeats wanted drama to present “an approach based on historical facts rather than subjective fantasies.” He expressed this in the poem “The Fisherman”:

All day I'd looked in the face

What I had hoped would be

To write for my race (Yeats, 1916).

The Irish spirit in Yeats's works has encouraged other writers to affirm their Irish identity and promote a sense of national identity in their works. He believed that a person cannot understand the traditions of other peoples without understanding his own identity and culture. In his “Autobiographies”, Yeats wrote that “the highest art is the traditional expression of heroic and religious truths, handed down from generation to generation, modified to some extent by individual methods, but never abandoned” (Yeats, 1955: 490).

He emphasized the necessity of the interrelationship between culture and tradition in the process of identity formation, believed that traditions played an important role in reflecting the national consciousness of the Irish people, and noted that Irish theatre was a source of inspiration for plays directly dedicated to the life of the Irish. In his works, the reconstruction of the Irish past was an expression of cultural upsurge, which was aimed at preserving and ensuring the continuity of Irish identity.

At the heart of Yeats's poetic drama is the concept of the mask. He saw the mask as a means of transcending personal identity and turning to universal archetypes. The use of masks in plays such as “At the Hawk's Well” indicated that drama should not imitate everyday behavior, but rather aim to show the deeper layers of human destiny. “Purgatory”, on the other hand, contains darker and more tragic motifs, focusing on sin, violence, and the cyclical processes in history. These works turn poetic drama into a means of confronting the destructive impulses at the heart of human existence.

The poetics of Yeats's dramas have a musical and magical tone, and the use of repetitive, rhythmic vari-

ations creates a hypnotic effect on the audience. Language here acts not only as a means of establishing dialogue, but also as a carrier of symbolic meaning and emotional mood. This approach proves Yeats's thesis that poetic drama should appeal to the imagination rather than rational analysis.

Although Yeats used the same plot structure and a system of fixed images throughout his dramaturgical work, this structure manifested itself differently in each play, leading to a variety of plots.

Turning points and structural motifs in Yeats' plays

Any plot of European drama, regardless of its genre, was built as a chain of sequential events and was connected by a cause-and-effect relationship. Since the episodes that make up the plot took place within a certain time frame, time intervals within the plot were necessary. In this time frame, the action and emotional background formed the basis of the events taking place. P. Szondi notes in his work “Theory of Modern Drama” that since the end of the 19th century, the classical dramatic form began to disintegrate and the cause-and-effect relationships that formed the basis of the plot weakened (Szondi, 1987: 9).

Over time, plots began to change in the new European drama: the material of the plot was no longer the events themselves, but the hidden psychological layers and social processes that determined them. The role of the external plot structure decreased, the action slowed down. The time principle of the plot turned into a timeless approach, the sequence of events became secondary, the main focus was on the simultaneous existence of certain relationships and situations. This approach, in addition to revealing universal, universal values, made it possible to reveal definite turning points in the fate of the character.

Yeats was one of the first writers to use this method. In his dramas, the plot is almost never built on the basis of a sequence of events, only some extreme situation in the fate of the character is taken into account. This transition, the breaking point in the fate of the character, forms the center of the drama. Peter Ure notes in his book of critical essays about Yeats that “almost all his plays are built on a moment of enlightenment, revelation, peripeteia and turning point” (Ure, 1974: 93). The characters do not actively move, there is almost no external dynamics in the plot. This moment of rupture, which occurs in the depths of the soul, is so significant that it is no longer possible to express it outwardly. Yeats took this principle as the basis of his theory of the art of tragedy: “The soul knows only changes in situation, and it seems to me that the motives of tragedy are connected not with action, but only with changes in situation” (Yeats,

1955: 402). Thus, the main motive of the plot is a change in situation. To realize this, Yeats uses several auxiliary motives, such as encounter, trial.

These motives determine the plot structure of almost all plays. Most of the plot is built on the encounter of heroes, one of whom is often subjected to trials. After this encounter, a change in situation occurs within the hero, accompanied by a deep shock, which often results in death. M. Maeterlinck emphasized that dramatic action arises from “invisible internal tension” (Maeterlinck, 1896: 112). According to this approach, as in Yeats’s dramas, the plot is minimized, and the main focus is on the metaphysical situation and internal transformation. In Yeats’s play “The Land of Heart’s Desire,” written in 1894, the events unfold against the backdrop of the main character Mary’s encounter with a fairy who takes her to a magical world. Mary dies on the threshold of her native home, and her soul passes into the spiritual world.

A similar structure is observed in Yeats’ play “Cathleen ni Houlihan.” An old woman who comes to the house of the peasant Gillian influences Michael, forcing him to leave his family and fiancée and join the rebellion against English rule. Here, too, the plot structure remains unchanged: the encounter, the test of the hero and the resulting turn in his fate.

The encounter motif also forms the plot of the drama “The King’s Threshold”, but here this motif is repeated many times and extended in terms of time. The poet Shanhan, who was deprived of the privilege of attending the royal council by King Gwer, decides to starve to death on the edge of the king’s palace. Other characters who come to him in turn try to dissuade him from opposing the king and persuade him to eat. These encounters are a test for Shanhan. The fact that there are more than one encounter does not change this, the structure of the plot and the roles of the characters remain the same. The transformation of the plot archetype is also manifested in the drama “The Green Helmet”. Here, unlike previous plays, not one, but three characters undergo a test encounter.

In reworking folklore and mythological material, Yeats tries to place the main fateful event of the main character's life at the center of the plot, focusing on his fate. This is also evident in his 1904 drama “On Baile’s Strand”. Here, the main plot is based on Cuchulain’s encounter with his unknown son and his death in battle on the orders of King Conchobar.

The recurring structure in Yeats’s drama can also be explained at the archetypal level. According to C.G. Jung, archetypes are stable forms of the collec-

tive unconscious and appear repeatedly in various texts (Jung, 1981: 42). In this respect, Yeats’s characters are an example of the archetypal hero model. As M. Eliade noted, the main feature of mythological structures is that they are based on the principle of literary repetition (Eliade, 1954: 34). This principle is clearly manifested in the structure of Yeats’s plots.

Yeats uses earlier motifs such as the path, encounter, and test in the plots of his later plays. In the play “Resurrection”, the mystical appearance of Jesus Christ becomes a test for his characters who do not believe in divine decrees. As a result of the encounter with Jesus Christ, the characters are forced to abandon their thoughts, they experience a moment of rupture within them, which completely changes their worldview.

The plots of the plays “The King of the Great Clock Tower” and “A Full Moon in March” are based on the meeting of the queen and the traveler. This meeting becomes a test for both characters, and a change occurs within both of them.

In the play “The Death of Cuchulain”, as in “The King’s Threshold”, the plot consists of a series of encounters. In the last meeting, Cuchulain dies, and thus the situation changes. The death of the hero as a result of the test is a typical ending of Yeats’ plots. Only in the play “Words Upon the Window Pane” there is no encounter and test motif, so the situation does not change.

Conclusion. Thus, Yeats consistently employed a unified structural model in his dramaturgy. Themes such as journeys into magical realms (“The Land of Heart’s Desire”), struggles for the homeland (“Cathleen ni Houlihan), conflicts between poets and authority (“The King’s Threshold”), and tests of courage and heroism (“The Green Helmet”) all follow the same structural pattern: the encounter, the protagonist’s trial, and the resulting transformation of the situation. Despite the diversity of plots, the underlying framework remains stable, unfolding through clearly defined stages. Unlike realist and naturalist dramaturgy, Yeats’ plays focus on the deeper layers of human existence, highlighting internal, metaphysical, and symbolic dimensions rather than mere external action. Consequently, his dramaturgy not only offers a distinctly modernist alternative to conventional European theater but also bridges national and universal perspectives, reflecting Ireland’s cultural identity while exploring timeless human experiences. This dual orientation allows his works to resonate across both local and global contexts, making them enduring contributions to the evolution of modern drama.

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