

## *The Image of Maud Gonne in Yeast's Selected Poems of The Rose*

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*Yeats's love poetry in his first volume The Rose is best understood in close relation to Maud Gonne .He finds in his love with Maud Gonne a cornerstone and a driving force which gains complete hold over his imagination and intellect .This love becomes an indispensable condition for the attainment of an idyllic world and the highest ascension towards an intellectual and ideal vision. As such , it forms the focal point in Yeats's whole existence since it is associated with ideal concepts , beauty , nobility , and his dream of building an idealized world .*

*Maud was an actress, a nationalist and a public figure who was to fit Yeats's desire to change his whole attitude to life and poetry. Although they shared a passion for Irish nationalism, Yeats's was skeptical of her extremist nationalist politics "trapped out" with her beauty:*

*I had never thought to see a living women of such great beauty. It belonged to famous pictures, to poetry, to some legendary past. A complexion like the blossom of apples, and yet face and body had the beauty of lineaments which Blake calls the highest beauty because it changes least from youth to age, and a stature so great that she seemed of a divine race. Her movements were worthy of her form, and I understood at last why the poet of antiquity,*

*where we would but speak of face and form,  
sings, loving some lady, that spaces like a goddess.<sup>1</sup>*

*Maud influenced his perceptions of an ideal and Romantic Ireland. Yeats realized that he must immerse directly in the Irish public life and hence demonstrate his commitment to serve Ireland publically instead of living the dream of creating an ideal world. This is evident in the Rose (1893) poems .*

*At the time that Yeats published the Rose poems, Maud Gonne was the major focus of his life. He was deeply in love with her, and although Gonne did not return his romantic sentiments, she remained close friend with him. Most of the poems of the collection were written for or about Gonne. 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”<sup>2</sup> . Thus, the central image of the rose is a symbol of Gonne as well as Ireland.*

*In his introductory poem “To the Rose Upon the Road of Times”(1891), Yeats entreats the Rose to help him find beauty in all aspects of life:*

*I find under the boughs of love and hate.*

*In all poor foolish things that live a day,*

*Eternal beauty wandering her way.(To the Rose upon the Road,lines 1-3)*

*Maud Gonne could also suggest the symbol of “Ireland, and ideal beauty”. She dedicated her life to the freedom of Ireland from English occupation, and she believed in violence as the best method to achieve this aim. Thus, Yeats was highly impressed by her patriotism and her instance vitality. He was also spelled by her eloquence and her domineering character to the extent that, as he state” if she said*

*the world was flat...I would be proud to be her party.”<sup>3</sup> She became the prototype of feminine beauty like envisaged that her nobility, vitality and beauty would qualify her to be his great love. Thus the rose became the poet’s symbol of spiritual love and supreme beauty.*

*In “The Rose of the world”(1892)for instance, the theme is an exaltation of Maud’s beauty. The Rose symbol is applied first to depict the classical beauty of Helen of Troy, and then Deirdre, the Irish mythical queen, both of whom are identified with Maud whose*

*beauty even the archangels in Heaven are compelled to pay homage to:*

*Bow down, archangels, in your dim abode:  
Before you were, or any hearts to beat,  
Weary and kind one lingered by His seat;  
Before her wandering feet. 4*

*This apotheosis of the lady to an elevated position, which is the first essential characteristic of the courtly love tradition recalls to mind Dante’s elevation of Beatrice to Divinity. Maud’s beauty in” The Rose of Peace”(1892)makes Michael forget his duty when he looks at her:*

*If Michael, leader of God’s host  
When Heaven and Hell are met,  
Looked down on you from Heave’s door-past  
He would his deeds forget.( The Rose of Peace,lines 1-4)*

*Maud’s beauty, which “suggests joy and freedom”, has the power to reconcile heaven and hell. Looking at her beauty, God will:*

*...bid His warfare cease,*

*Saying all things were well;  
And softly make a rosy peace,  
A peace of Heaven with Hell.( The Rose of Peace,lines 4-8)*

*Indeed, Yeats's love for Maud Gonne seems to fulfill the requirements of the courtly love tradition. They stipulate that the passion of love is awakened in man by the sight and contemplation of the physical and especially of the moral and spiritual qualities of the lady. The lady occupies an exalted position above the lover. This love is essentially a desire, a yearning for the beloved. From this love proceeds in virtue and rises in worth towards the beloved who is its source. Thus, the Rose becomes what the "epipsyche" mean to Shelley. It is the symbol of ideal love whereby the lover aspires to achieve union with.*

*In "The white Birds" (1892), Yeats imagines a perfect union with his beloved in which the "psyche" and "epipsyche" merge into one unified identity, after which the lovers live in an ideal and remote world. Love provides the means of the transformation, "Love is the perception of beauty in thought and things, and it orders all things by love".<sup>5</sup> To transcend the flawed and quotidian world, Yeats a spires that love would change him together with his beloved into two "White birds" :*

*I would that we were, my beloved, white birds  
on the foam of the sea!  
We tire of the flame of the meteor, before it  
can fade and flee.(The White Birds,lines 1-3)*

*Yeats, in Harold Baker's words, "makes the birds the embodiment of force superior to ordinary human forces".<sup>5</sup> By transforming into "White birds" the lovers can escape the transitoriness of ordinary life given through the image of the "meteor", and fly to the mythical*

*islands of Danaan shores where "age and death have not found it, neither tears nor loud laughter have grown near it."*<sup>6</sup>

*Maud was too involved in her political activities to think of marriage ; As she kept turning down Yeats proposals, she urged him to be "strong enough and high enough to accept the spiritual love and union [she] offered"*<sup>7</sup>. Consequently, both she and Yeats referred to their relationship as a "mystical marriage". Thus, the frustrating complexity of the relationship contributed elements of blame, accusation, guilt and self-condemnation. Thus, The theme of unrequited love can be noticed in "The Two Trees" and other poems of the same collection . The poems was inspired by his fear that *Gonne's natural vitality might be corrupted by political dogmatism.*

*"The Two Trees", for instance revolves around the symbol of the Tree of life and the Tree of knowledge of Good and Evil-Frank Kermode sees that the Tree of life, "the holy tree" of the poem, "is inhabited by love, and it grows in the heart of a women who is beautiful and does not thing"*<sup>8</sup>. As a result, in the first section of the poem, Yeats's urges Maud to look deeply in her heart where the Tree of life is flourishing:

*Beloved, gaze in thin own heart,  
The holy tree is growing there;  
From Joy the holy branches start,*

*And all the trembling flowers they bear.(The Two Trees,lines 1-4)*

*This "holy Tree" emanating with beauty and joy, inspires the lover to sing "a wizard song" for his beloved. In contrast to this tree, is the Tree of knowledge of Good and Evil. When the beloved looks at this tree, she will participate in the evil corruptible world. Thus, the*

*beloved is urged not to look at the " bitter glass" where she might see the image of this tree:*

*Gaze no more in the bitter glass  
For there a fatal image grows  
That the stormy night receives  
Root half hidden under snows*

*Broken boughs and blackened leaves.(The Two Trees ,lines 4-8)*

*In looking at this tree, the beloved's eyes will no longer be bright " Thy tender eyes grow all unkind/Gaze no more in the bitter glass". Maud Gonne, however, could not offer to accept such an introspective advice. She wrote in her memories :*

*I never indulged in self-analysis and often used to get impatient with Willie Yeats, who like all writers, was terribly introspective and tried to make me so. I have no time to think of myself, I told him which was literary true, for unconsciously perhaps, I had redoubled work to avoid thought.<sup>9</sup>*

*Yeats's pursuit of ideal vision and consequently his remoteness from the on temporary Irish struggle for independence brought him the censure of the Irish national figures who accused him of living in an illusory world, and hence, turning away from the Irish cause. Arthur Griffith, an Irish national figure, claims that:*

*What we want from our people is not mystory-mongering or speculative philosophy... we want the poets to inspire and lift the people's heart, and not mystify them.<sup>10</sup>*

*Throughout his poetic career, Yeats emphasized that poetry must not be devoted to the daily demands of politics. Poetry has a profound and great taste that exceeds the calls of popular politics. In "To Ireland in the coming Times"(1892), which concludes The Rose poems, Yeats tends that though much of his poetry is devoted to ideal visions, "to that mystical rose which has saddened my friends,"<sup>11</sup> yet such visions can stimulate the Irish people in their aspirations towards a better state of things. The job of the Irish writer is to recreate the ideal image of ancient Ireland, through the revival of Irish heritage and literature. Yeats demands from the future of Irish generation to consider him as being no less in rank than that of the Irish national poets, Davis, Mangan, and Ferguson because he refused to subordinate his poetry to public politics :*

*Know, that I would accounted  
True brother of a company  
That sang, to Sweeten Ireland's wrong,*

*Ballad and story, rann and song.(To Ireland in the coming times,lines 1-4)*

*In fact, Yeats had personified and objectified all these ideal concepts in the character of Maud Gonne who was the dominating figure in his whole life, work, and the inspirer of his best love poetry. In accordance with the Shelleyan "epipsyche" Which is considered as the embodiment of all goodness, virtue and truth, Yeats finds in Maud Gonne his epipsyche. However , the ideal union did not take place as result of the discrepancy in their political views. Yeats could not allow his art to drag into the use of public politics, whereas Maud Gonne refused to abandon her political career for the sake of Yeats's passion.*

## Notes

1

Seamus Deane, "Our Children Were Your Poems,"  
( a review of *The Donne-Yeats Letters*), *The New  
York Times Book Review*, January 10, 1993.

2

*The Variorum Education of the Poems of W.B-Yeats*,  
ed. Peter Allt and R-k. Al spash (New York:  
Macmillan 50,1957, p.846.  
Hereafter cited as *The Variorum Education*.

3

Thomas Parkinson , *W.b-Yeats: Self-Critic, a study of  
his Early Verse and Later poetry*, vol.I.(Calif-  
ornia:Calafornia University . Press, 1964), P.q .

4

*The Variorum Education* ,P.811 .

5

*Yeats and Maud Donne were walking in the Dublin  
mountains –Exhausted, they sat on the grass and  
Yeats composed this final stanza*

6

"The philosophy of Shelley's poetry" in *E &I*, P.89 .

7

Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image* (London: Rout  
ledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), P,98 .

8

*Maud Gonne, A Servant of the Queens, (London: Macmillan Co. Ltd, 1950)P.257 .*

9

*Maud Gonne, “ Yeats and Ireland: An Address to American Audiences, 1932-3”, Massachusetts Review, VI, 1963-4, P.*

10

*Ibid., p.35.*

11

*Ibid., p.44.*