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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Psychological Constructs and Defensive Transformations: Yeats's Mythic Poetry as a Response to Political and Cultural Dilemmas

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| ABSTRACT

Yeats's mythic poetry has often been approached from two distinct perspectives: either as an tribute to Ireland and its people or as a mirror reflecting the political turbulence of his times. Nonetheless, this study veers onto a distinct course, probing the psychological constituents manifested in Yeats's engagement with myths. The focal point of this investigation is Yeats's application of ego mechanisms as a method to sail around the sociopolitical obstacles he faced. The central argument posited here is the necessity to discern the recurrent psychological motifs when dissecting Yeats's mythological work. Drawing substantially on Freud's hypotheses about ego defense mechanisms, this study's objective is to shed light on how Yeats employed myths and folklore as a form of psychological defense to grapple with Ireland's contemporary political and existential uncertainties. A thorough analysis of selected mythological poems from diverse stages of Yeats's career unveils his recurrent utilization of defensive strategies embedded within Irish narratives, while concurrently endeavoring to rekindle a sense of national pride and identity amidst Ireland's unstable state. Yeats's poetic endeavors exceed mere storytelling; they constitute a conduit for psychological metamorphosis, aspiring to intertwine the ingrained tradition of legends with the intricate realities of modern Irish existence.

| KEYWORDS

Mythic poetry, defense mechanisms, folk literature, cultural awakening

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### 1. Introduction

The literary legacy of Yeats has left an enduring mark. His works have been greatly influential in challenging the historical and political instability inherent in Ireland's past. In particular, Yeats' poems are recognized as key elements in a literary continuum that constantly strives to strengthen the country's collective identity. Furthermore, Yeats's notable input during the Irish cultural revival of the nineteenth century earned him a unique literary status and acknowledgment. Amid his tireless patriotic endeavors, Yeats's poetic expressions were pivotal in transforming Irish folklore by creatively retelling the heroic and the mournful aspects of Ireland's myth.

Yeats paints a picture of Ireland as a possessor of a rich cultural legacy that precedes British occupation. However, the Irish poet and playwright never loses sight of the nation's susceptibilities, its historic exploitation, and the unbearable wrongs it endured under British imperialism. The retrieval of legendary narratives like 'Oisín,' 'Cúchulainn,' and 'Fergus,' serves not just as a relief to heal a disjointed sense of unity but also encapsulates an deep understanding of the core Irish identity (Creed, 2017). Guided by this introspective perspective, Yeats made impressive progress in arousing nationalistic awareness among his audience to shield it from self-annihilation. His central objective in reviving Celtic mythology was to furnish Irish art with a purely national viewpoint and to inspire a beleaguered nation by harking back to its folkloric past (Foster, 1997).

Yeats's exploration of the nation's persistent paradoxes serves as a cohesive force in his artistic journey. Through a study of historical belief systems, Yeats aims to confront prevailing political frameworks and to seek superior solutions to evade or reconcile crises. His work serves as a vessel for resonating with Irish history and explicating the paradoxes of Irish identity, origin, and progression. Yeats also champions the notion that Irish writers should play an active role in forging a national literature that challenges British stereotypic painting of the Irish as uncivilized. He, along with others sharing his vision, endeavored to elicit a sense of Ireland's heroic past existing prior to colonization. They leveraged myths, legends, and folklore to realize this objective (Bradley, 2011). Yeats employed national mythology to comprehend and tackle the hurdles faced by Irish society. His strategy was grounded in ancient folklore and Celtic culture, providing a glimpse into how their ancestors might have managed similar predicaments. As Wenzell (2009) notes, Yeats was captivated by the Irish poor due to their dependence on imagination and the unconscious in their everyday existence. He acknowledged the value of disseminating their imagined histories.

Yeats recognizes the social importance of myth, but his embrace of these legends reflects their profound significance for Ireland's present-day realities. The tight link between folklore revival and day-to-day Irish social and political life implies that personal interpretations cannot subsist independently of the current state of the nation. As a result, both the merits and drawbacks of Yeats's approach to myth are fully embodied, inseparable from shared experiences. Caldwell, (1993) contends that when individuals integrate shared myths into their behaviors, it results in fortifying and enhancing the spiritual ties among individuals and the collective, which, in turn, boosts collective resilience.

Observing that the Irish poet often seems absorbed in the persistent task of integrating Irish commemorative cultural folklore into his poetry, it's critical to underscore the manner in which collective traumatic experiences are manifested in Yeats's poetry when he meticulously transforms his dream-like revisions of myth. Poems like "The Wanderings of Oisín," "Leda and the Swan," and "Cuchulain Comforted" recurrently display patterns of denial, fantasy, rationalization, acting out, and dissociation. The rich weave of imagery and narrative paths within these poems consistently stem from Yeats's need to shield his national sentiments from perceived threats and unendurable external realities. As a result, Yeats's mythopoetic ventures can be understood as imaginatively reproducing the political anxieties and reactively functioning within them.

The current research suggests that Yeats's myth-inspired poems demonstrate a deep and intrinsic link between the poet and the historical and cultural identity of Ireland. His poems not just articulate his strong sense of belonging, but also portray his steadfast dedication to nurturing a unified culture. The article argues that Yeats, driven by self-preservation, deliberately avoids accepted national ideologies. In an attempt to address the philosophical and political uncertainties that permeated Irish society during his time, Yeats skillfully reconfigures the Irish mythical narrative. This article takes an interdisciplinary approach by examining how Yeats uses myth as a means of defense and an attempt to make sense of the horrific political experiences Ireland was experiencing at the time. The purpose of this research is to shed light on how Yeats uses myth as a defense mechanism to cope with political unrest. The study delves into the psychological underpinnings of Yeats' mythological reformulations in an effort to understand how myth serves as a shield for the poet, allowing him to make sense of the political chaos around him. This study seeks to illuminate how Yeats's reliance on myth becomes not only a source of inspiration but also a means of negotiating the complexity of the historical backdrop.

## **2. Literature Review**

The focus of this literature review is to examine Yeats's use of myth as a powerful tool to address the common political worries of his time. W.B. Yeats's investigation of the history of Irish culture has sparked extensive academic debate. Several critics had trouble understanding why the Irish poet goes back to reimagine classic Celtic myths and legends. A considerable number of critics, however, hold the view that the Irish poet's use of legendary motifs reflects his frustration with the gap between the harsh realities of the present and the imagined national ideal of the past. The review also delves into how myth serves as a psychological refuge for both individuals and communities, helping people make sense of the world and find solace during trying times.

### **a) Yeats's Reaction to Colonial Tensions and National Anxieties**

In a comprehensive study conducted in 2008, Ben-Merre contends that Yeats's identity was deeply intertwined with Irish politics and national mythology. He argues that Yeats deployed mythology as a political instrument, thereby redefining Ireland's sociopolitical climate during the early 20th century. Ben-Merre identifies Yeats's "mythological flights" as an effort to "forge the national consciousness of his race" (p. 73). From Ben-Merre's perspective, Yeats's quest to reconcile fantasy and reality engenders the themes of the "heroic life" and "the homecoming of the mythical figure Oisín" (p. 73). Deane (1996) agrees with Ben-Merre's line of inquiry, emphasizing the significant role of myth in reflecting Yeats's engagement with his nation's realities. Yeats's "sense of crisis" empowered him to perceive "archetypal patterns of history" emerging from contemporary politics and to ascribe Ireland's backwardness "a spiritual glamour" (Deane, 1996, p. 133).

Yeats strategically utilizes mythic imagination to account for the destructive consequences of time and the cultural influence of Britain. Holdeman (2006) posits that Yeats's poetry frequently scrutinizes potential political impacts, portraying Irish politics through "chivalric allegories" (p. 6). Holdeman maintains that Yeats taps into the reservoir of Gaelic culture's folk beliefs and heroic myths to underscore his apprehensions concerning the complexities of Ireland's state of affairs. By depicting the nation as a source

of beauty, wisdom, and heroic zeal, Yeats's poetic endeavors can be seen an attempt to contest negative Irish stereotypes. Yeats uses his mythic imagination as a strategy to defy the erosive effects of time and the infringement of British culture (Holdeman, 2006).

The underlying sense of frustration and discontent in Yeats's work reflects the challenging political realities of his time. Lockerd (2011) notes that the Irish poet initially aimed to recreate a utopian vision of Ireland. Gradually, however, Yeats's growing cynicism and disillusionment led him to reassess his own nationalist aspirations. This transformative sentiment is particularly evident in the poem "Sailing to Byzantium," wherein Yeats abandons his dream of a flawless isle, preferring instead the enduring artistic symbol of Byzantium. Nevertheless, Lockerd (2011) identifies a constant feeling of frustration and discontent in Yeats's oeuvre indicative of the challenging realities of his period.

Of note, many scholars recognize the nationalist elements in Yeats's oeuvre and concede his pivotal role in the decolonization process. As posited by Said (1990), the historical and political milieu served as a unique catalyst for Yeats, spurring him to infuse themes of courage and sacrifice into his poetic and dramatic compositions. Said's (1990) analysis links Yeats' nationalist poems to radical poetry, illustrating how Yeats' literary contributions responded to key historical events in Ireland, such as the infamous Easter Uprising of 1916. Said (1990) underscores Yeats' commitment to his mission, presenting him as a poet who opposed imperialism. Yeats chose to create a "new narrative" for the Irish community (Said 1990, p. 85), rather than transforming his poetry into manifest political propaganda. This viewpoint illuminates Yeats' determination to employ his poetic expression to confront colonial issues while preserving some semblance of artistic and psychological integrity.

### ***b) Mythical Constructs as Defense Mechanisms***

An in-depth examination of myths underscores their significance in mitigating guilt and anxiety, promoting collective adaptation to reality, and shaping individual identity formation and superego development. Merkur (2012) emphasizes that myths function as "defenses" (p. 63), providing a basis for the internal and external articulation of conflicting impulses. In this context, myths aid in the conversion of aggression into more acceptable forms. Myths also stave off individual neuroses by pacifying communal unease (Merkur, 2012, p. 74). In J. Smith's (1996) view, egos are developed within the context of "psychic reality," serving as the foundation for contrasting defensive fantasy configurations (p. 124). These shared defensive mechanisms are a product of the interconnectedness of languages, history, and cultures among individuals (J. Smith, 1996). The notion of "psychic reality" emphasizes the influence of shared experiences and cultural factors on the formations of egos and the ways people cope with challenges. Arlow's (1961) study probes into the defensive and adaptive significance of myths, emphasizing their role in repeated narrative modifications, in alleviating guilt and anxiety, and in influencing societal adaptation and individual identity (Arlow, 1961). Myths facilitate hence the process of group adaptation to reality. In essence, they act as collective coping mechanisms that can help communities navigate societal changes, environmental challenges, and historical events. By giving shape to a shared understanding of the world, myths can foster unity and resilience within a group, aiding in its collective response to the realities of life.

The literature surveyed elucidates the complex internal and external conflicts that Yeats faced throughout his poetic career. The insights offered by critics yield a nuanced understanding of Yeats's mythic poetry, emphasizing its significant engagement with pressing issues in Irish society, specifically the dynamic political practices of the time. The literature review has also shown the significant role played by myths and legendary folkloric stories in equipping individuals and communities with defense mechanisms to confront and manage annexed realities. These timeless narratives serve as the psychological refuge, offering solace and sense of meaning amidst life's uncertainties and challenges.

### **3. Methodology**

Historically, the notion of myth has been understood as a defensive response employed in reaction to collective hardship or trauma. This viewpoint underscores the function of myth in crafting stories that enable societies to navigate difficulties, thus emphasizing its healing role. In dissecting Yeats's incorporation of myth within his poetic constructions, the relevance of Freud's theory of defense mechanisms gains prominence. Freud's concepts offer important glimpses into the manner in which individuals, and correspondingly societies, employ specific strategies to shield themselves from emotional distress. Applying these concepts to Yeats's work can shed light on how the poet employs myth not merely as a literary tool, but also as a vehicle to navigate and possibly ease societal stress and struggles of his era. Hence, a holistic investigation of Yeats's poetic mythology demands a grasp of Freudian defense mechanisms, as they offer a crucial perspective to examine the relationship between sociopolitical turmoil and the refuge provided by myth.

Freud's psychoanalytic theory postulates that the Ego utilizes defenses to counteract internal and external threats when overburdened by pressures from external reality, the Id, and the Superego. Freud (1959) points out in "Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety" that these defenses discourage threats and strive to obstruct emotionally damaging charges "along similar lines" (p. 92-93). Freud (1959) delineates various defense mechanisms and outlines procedures to identify them. Vaillant (1992) explicates Freud's key tenets for discerning defenses: "[First] defenses are a major means of managing instinct and affects. [Second], defenses

are unconscious" (4). The third point is that "they are discrete (one from another). [Fourth], although they are often the hallmark of major psychiatric symptoms, defenses are dynamic and reversible. [Finally], defenses can be adaptive as well as pathological" (Vaillant, 1992, p. 4). The theory of defense mechanisms saw further expansion through Freud's daughter Anna and other researchers. Anna Freud (1936) notes that "the term 'defense,' is the earliest representative of the dynamic standpoint in psychoanalytic theory. It occurs [in Freud's findings] to describe the ego's struggle against painful or unendurable ideas or affects" (A. Freud, 1936, p. 42). These mechanisms "manifest themselves in innumerable transformations, distortions, and deformities of the ego, which are in part the accomplishment of and in part substitutes for neurosis" (A. Freud, 1936, p. 50). Contemporary theorists consider defenses as mechanisms managing anxiety from both internal and external threats (Cramer, 2006).

The incorporation of Freud's theory of defense mechanisms becomes a vital step when carrying out an exhaustive study of Yeats's mythological poetry. This theoretical framework offers a significant perspective to investigate the fluid relationship between societal distress and the comfort rendered by myth. The theory aids in the profound understanding of how Yeats's poetry might have been a psychological reaction to the societal turmoil of his era, providing refuge through the medium of myth. Therefore, Freud's concept not only augments our interpretation of Yeats's oeuvre but also emphasizes the inherent connections between literature, psychology, and societal conditions.

#### 4. Discussion: Analyzing Yeats's Mechanisms of Keeping National Apprehension at Bay

Yeats's myth-inspired work *The Wanderings of Oisín and Other Poems* (published in 1889) is an eloquent representation of a deep-seated desire for liberation from an oppressive societal atmosphere. In this long poem, the protagonist Oisín departs from his native Ireland and embarks on a journey towards Timanog, a paradise revered as the home of Gods. The narrative is marked by Oisín's three supernatural flights, an allegory used by Yeats to reflect the necessary struggle to deal with immediate crises. Through the adventures of Oisín, Yeats derives consolation by employing the psychological strategy of dissociation to challenge the contours of reality. This protective mechanism is characterized by a fragmentation or 'splitting' of the cognitive process, leading to changes in self-awareness and physical perception. As stated by Scaer (2001), dissociation is characterized by several clinical manifestations, including changes in perceptions and actions. These manifestations encompass derealization, depersonalization, and distortions in the experience of time. According to Watkins and Watkins (1997), dissociation is thought to be an inherent aspect of human psychology, serving to facilitate processes such as adaptability, cognition, action, and reaction. Within the narrative's framework, Oisín's encounters and recollections exhibit a disconnection both among themselves and from his temporal perception. This detachment becomes more acute given the unfavorable national conditions. Yeats skillfully uses variations from the original tale of Oisín to weave together the past and present, allowing them to retell the same core mythic narrative. Signs of Oisín's dissociation are evident in his sense of detachment and his tendency to lose track of time. This intentional distancing primarily serves to provide Yeats with a gradual confrontation with reality, instead of being instantly overwhelmed by anxiety. During instances of extreme aggression, the victims often find themselves paralyzed by fear and helplessness, resorting to mechanisms such as dissociation to escape the situation. In this narrative, Oisín's disconnection from time gives rise to a necessary sense of alienation that portrays a protective stance. In Book I, Yeats places the present moment side by side with the concept of losing time:

And here there is nor Change nor Death,  
But only kind and merry breath,  
For joy is God and God is joy.'  
With one long glance for girl and boy  
And the pale blossom of the moon,  
He fell into a Druid swoon.  
And in a wild and sudden dance  
We mocked at Time and Fate and Chance (Yeats, 1989, p. 363, lines 281-88)

Dwan (2008) remarks that Yeats's early poetry often depicts creative attempts to evade the constraints of time. A clear illustration of this is Oisín's adventure to the Land of Youth, where he dares to scoff at the notions of "Time, Fate, and Chance". Dwan (2008) further supports the idea that, in order to mask the psychological discomfort, Yeats's Oisín challenges the constructs of Change and Time, adjusting the perception of adverse events and redirecting them towards more pleasant endeavors. In Book II, where time and space seem almost inseparable, Yeats's transient loss of awareness – a sign of his dissociative state – traces the course of his wandering journey:

I do not know if days  
Or hours passed by, yet hold the morning rays  
Shone many times among the glimmering flowers  
Woven into her hair, before dark towers  
Rose in the darkness, and the white surf gleamed  
About them; and the horse of Faery screamed

And shivered, knowing the Isle of Many Fears,  
Nor ceased until white Niamh stroked his ears  
And named him by sweet names. (Yeats, 1989, p. 363, 20-28)

In this disquieting reverie, Oisín doesn't surrender to terror. Instead, he employs dissociation as an extreme defensive mechanism to reconcile with his predicament. The subconscious reactions to traumas or internal stressors can be inadvertently accessed through the spontaneous correlations established by an unrestrained memory. It is through this process that dissociative structures can assist in shaping a novel viewpoint on reality—one that transcends temporal limitations. In the third book of the series, the expansive and complex realm of memory loss resonates with Yeats's poetic juxtapositions: "Were we days long or hours long in riding, when, rolled in a grisly peace, / An isle lay level before us, with dripping hazel and oak?" (Yeats, 1989, p. 374, lines 9-10). Oisín's dissociative memory loss functions as a tool that aids in severing him from the traumatic recollections:

And by me, in soft red raiment, the Fenians moved in loud streams,  
And Grania, walking and smiling, sewed with her needle of bone.  
So lived I and lived not, so wrought I and wrought not, with creatures of dreams,  
In a long iron sleep, as a fish in the water goes dumb as a stone  
At times our slumber was lightened. When the sun was on silver or gold; (Yeats, 1989, p. 379, lines 93-96)

In both disorienting and reorienting Oisín within a dissociative sphere distinguished by the vague timeframe of "were we days long or hours long in riding," Yeats manages to exert some control over the numerous facets of the hero's lost identities. He eventually situates himself at the defensive periphery of "so lived I and lived not." Aguilera (1994) suggests that "the poem might be interpreted as a complete denial of the tangible Ireland anchored to the antiheroic ideal of Christian life, and as a regressive retreat from history in the search for an alternative cultural identity" (p. 9). Aguilera (1994) posits that Yeats employs the intensity of Oisín's mythical journey to extricate himself from the unease of his surroundings and rejuvenate his national pride.

Yeats's third poetry collection *The Rose* (published in 1893) has been always read in its extreme affiliation to Irish history and politics. Three years earlier to its publication, the Irish Parliamentary Party split following the disclosure of Parnell's divorce scandal and its outcome in terminating the political career of the most influential Irish national leader. Parnell died in 1891, leaving Ireland vacant and divided. In his earliest representations of mythology, Yeats remains acutely aware of Ireland's political uncertainties. He channels his poetic prowess to forge robust reactions designed to fortify and elevate the despondent national sentiments. As noted by Holdeman (2006), "Yeats sympathized with Parnell, but also saw his failure as a sign that the time had come to turn Ireland's attention away from politics and toward more fundamental cultural and spiritual concerns" (p. 17).

The poem "Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea," encompassed within "*The Rose*" collection, manifests Yeats's patriotic sentiments and the poetic fervor they incite in a reinterpreted manner. This poem not only taps into Yeats's perpetual intrigue with Celtic mythology but also delves into the strategies utilized by the heroic figure to alleviate feelings of guilt and shame. The poem, in its bid to relieve Yeats's discomfort towards the prevailing state of his nation, generates notable poetic tension. By mythologizing the nation's wavering sense of heroism, the piece unveils, alongside intellectual and political complexities, the poet's internal struggle. Yeats's focus on reshaping Cuchulain's predicament act as a defensive counter to the gloomy "national" scenery that the hero can no longer endorse. The poem's final lines illuminate both the need to identify a less harmful channel for the hero's emotions and Conchubar's proposed tactic to alleviate Cuchulain's fury. Conchubar's plea to "Chaunt in his ear delusions magical / That he may fight the horses of the sea" (Yeats, 1989, p. 36, lines 85-86) aptly encapsulates the coping strategies underscored by this mythological construct in dealing with a sense of unease and existential anxiety. The hero employs a conduit for his anger, metamorphosing his discomfort into a clash against the phantom horses of the sea:

The Druids took them to their mystery,  
And chanted for three days.  
Cuchulain stirred,  
Stared on the horses of the sea, and heard  
The cars of battle and his own name cried;  
And fought with the invulnerable tide. (Yeats, 1989, p. 36, 87-92)

Miller (2002) discerns that the struggle of Cuchulain "demonstrates a duality that is both poetic and political" (p. 148). This binary aspect is inherently woven into the poem's structural fabric, not solely embodying an "exemplary expression of actions - whether right, wrong, or noble - following the killing of a son," but it also allegorizes a nation's physical and geographic boundaries, encapsulating an "island-like awareness" (Miller, 2002, p.148). When Cuchulain frees himself from the shackles of guilt, he simultaneously alleviates the unease that plagues both him and his nation. Cuchulain's displacement of his fury onto the wild sea waves can be interpreted as a mechanism to soothe the consequences of inactivity.

In the verses of his poem, Yeats exhibits an identifiable defensive mechanism - rationalization, through his reimagining of the myth's narrative arc. Kouyoumdjian and Plotnik (2012) define this mechanism as the act of "obscuring genuine motives of actions, thoughts, or feelings by fabricating justifications and erroneous explanations" (p. 437). By elucidating the pressures that compelled Emer's son to decide to challenge his father Cuchulain, and through a stark deviation from the original Cuchulain's tale, Yeats orchestrates a predestined, unavoidable encounter between the father and son, thereby laying the groundwork for an approaching conflict. Bodsworth (2012) elucidates how Yeats, in his revisionist take on the myth, magnifies the likelihood of the murder. In the traditional myth, Cuchulain, albeit an absentee father, gave an object - a gold ring or a chain - for his son to use as a way of identification, suggesting some degree of concern for his son's future. Contrarily, in Yeats's reformulation of the tale, However, in Yeats's poem, Cuchulain leaves no such token and is so indifferent towards his marriage that he remains unaware of having a son. Through this modification, Yeats appears to be providing a justification for the inevitability of the clash in Irish history, while at the same time criticizing the nation's current inability to achieve its desired spirit of national unity and cohesion.

"Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea" simultaneously functions as a reflective mirror of Yeats's unsympathetic tendency to articulate his internal resentment towards the prevailing circumstances in Ireland, elucidating the subject of nationalized antagonism. As per Bodsworth's (2012) analysis, the poem markedly deviates from the revivalist objectives as it subverts the conventional discourse of hero worship, transforming instead into a cautionary narrative against overbearing aggression and hubris. The poetic selections employed by Yeats in "Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea" appear to be an endeavor to regulate the all-encompassing sentiment of national desolation by vividly portraying it through representations of intricate familial and national intricacies and instances of domestic and nationwide violence. The verse achieves its most alarmingly savage climax when bloodshed intertwines with a paternal revelation, highlighting how the poetic construction of the "national" myth transmutes into a vent for the release of psychological tension.

Again the fighting sped,  
 But now the war-rage in Cuchulain woke,  
 And through that new blade's guard the old blade broke,  
 And pierced him.  
 'Speak before your breath is done.'  
 'Cuchulain I, mighty Cuchulain's son.' (Yeats, 1989, p. 35, lines 68-73)

Yeats's restless imagination, irrespective of its proximity or divergence from the archetypal Cuchulain narrative, finds solace in the poetic depiction of the cruelty and relentlessness of the "aged blade" that unmercifully pierces a son, serving as a unique outlet for the prevailing national anxieties. Through his imaginative interaction with the historical legend of Cuchulain, Yeats can also be perceived as consumed by the unconscious strategy of diverting attention from the often-stressful present to a more gratifying historical emphasis, particularly through the implementation of dissociation as a coping mechanism. As Wenzell (2007) posits, the sea in "Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea" represents an insurmountable force for the Celtic hero, embodying the eternal struggle between the past and the present, and ultimately merging into a state of "twilight" between them. The distant and intimate national history emerges as the only consoling solution capable of sustaining a tolerable present and safeguarding a plagued national identity. Furthermore, Yeats irresistibly dwells in the past dailyness of Emer as she was "raddling raiment in her dun" and who then "Cast the web upon the floor /And raising arms all raddled with the dye" (Yeats, 1989, p. 33, lines 6-7). The Irish poet exhibits a noticeable tendency to escape too far off his modern Ireland to inhabit its pastoral times of yore and its tranquil moments of ultimate blamelessness.

In "Fergus and the Druid," another mythical composition within *The Rose*, Yeats grants King Fergus the voice to articulate an intensifying sentiment of detachment, isolation, and discomfort associated with his royal obligations. This literary piece provides a critical examination of the psychological dichotomy experienced by an individual feeling alienated within an inhospitable atmosphere, and his unyielding pursuit for politically induced tranquility. Moreover, the poem offers a window through which Yeats's disapproval of the political realm's pretentiousness and affectation becomes discernible, portraying a life immersed in monotony and misery. Yeats's depiction of the deteriorating and lifeless political architectures uncovers a profound longing to exchange worldly prosperity for alternatives that offer spiritual solace: "Druid: What would you, Fergus? / Fergus: Be no more a king / But learn the dreaming wisdom that is yours" (Yeats, 1989, p. 32, lines 23-25). This instance illuminates the utter disillusionment associated with contemporary political pursuits, employing Fergus's aspiration to 'identify' himself with the Druid's "dreaming wisdom" as an alternative defensive tactic. In their discourse, Nurcombe and Gallagher (1986) expound on the application of "this defense pattern [of identification] ...on someone much admired or loved (identification with the loved object), someone who has been lost (identification of the lost object), and identification with the lost object is integral to normal grief" (p. 58). In his endeavor to transcend weakness and embrace the inspirational attributes of the Druids, Fergus identifies with them. By assimilating the spiritually attuned practices of the Druids, King Fergus affectively masks his disquieting sense of inferiority through

the mechanism of identification. He successfully deploys of this psychological strategy to alleviate his underlying insecurities, thereby reinforcing his position within his societal role.

"Fergus and the Druid" largely dedicates its narrative to critique the underlying ideologies that inform the fabric of modern Irish politics. Saunders (2014) contends that Yeats, akin to the so-called King Fergus in "Fergus and the Druid," chooses to avoid political engagement, aligning himself instead with a philosophical construct named as "dreaming wisdom." This wisdom surpasses the realm of politics, even though it may appear less tangible or believable in comparison. Saunders' (2014) examination reveals that "Fergus and the Druid" serves as a platform for Yeats to reimagine a mythic narrative that contests the ideologies characteristic of a particular historical period. However, the transformation of the Druid character may symbolize the difficulty of perceiving and experiencing the vibrant past, revealing the ambiguous, distorted, and hazy nature of Irish history. Developing a sense of identification with this history becomes increasingly challenging:

Fergus, this whole day have I followed in the rocks,  
And you have changed and flowed from shape to shape,  
First as a raven on whose ancient wings  
Scarcely a feather lingered, then you seemed  
A weasel moving on from stone to stone,  
And now at last you wear a human shape,  
A thin grey man half lost in gathering night. (Yeats, 1989, p. 542, lines 1-7)

Druids were "celebrated for their intellectual prowess and eloquence...[they] were additionally reputed to perform therapeutic roles" (MacLeod, 2012, p. 26). Fergus's choice to "follow" the Druid "in the rocks" is symbolic of a deep spiritual quest that goes beyond the physical and into the metaphysical realms of Irish mythology. By identifying with the Druids, Fergus is basically aligning himself with the timeless wisdom and way of life of his ancestors. This choice shows not only a respect for the past, but also a deep-seated desire to identify with and learn from the spiritual traditions of the Celtic people. Fergus's trip becomes a symbol of the search for wisdom, spiritual enlightenment, and self-discovery, with deep roots in the spiritual and cultural history of Ireland. Fergus's spiritual adaptation to the circumstances he perceives offer a metaphorical solace for the entire nation he symbolizes.

The turbulent years following the 1916 Easter Rising and the resulting political unrest are inevitably reflected in Yeats' defensive responses during the latter phase of his poetic career. Yeats's middle-aged defenses reflect modes of violence through the repetitive use of certain patterns in poems like "Leda and the Swan," where he struggles with the stormy atmosphere of Irish independence. In this poem, Yeats explores the underlying violence of the political issues of the time, specifically the violent civil war that broke out between anti-treaty and pro-treaty supporters between 1922 and 1923:

A sudden blow: the great wings beating still  
Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed  
By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,  
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast (Yeats, 1989, p.214, lines 1-4)

Stronger and more combative perspectives emerge in Yeats's mature and later defensive works. An aggressive defense by Yeats in his poem "Leda and the Swan" reveals how violence may become an integral component of expression. The poet paints a chilling picture of Leda being ensnared "by the dark webs" and controlled "by the brute blood of air" during the terrifying rape. By using this image, Yeats shows how political unrest may dominate even the most creative of processes. He foretells that, much like Troy fell to the Greeks because of Zeus's mistreatment of Léda, Ireland will experience upheaval and instability as it strives for independence from England (Neigh, 2006). To convey extreme acting out, which is a defense mechanism that enables people to express their ideas and emotions through their acts, Yeats uses bloodshed, brutality, and attack as poetic expressions (Andriana & Kasrabowo, 2020). While he finds it difficult to articulate the severe political environment in any other manner, Yeats does it through these intense descriptions. Bradley (2011) observes a profound correlation between the mythical portrayal of Leda's violation and the nation's lingering recollection of violence, stating that "[Yeats] was very aware of what had happened over the course of the Irish Civil War and drew analogies" (p. 122). The poem's tense imagery and the extraordinary fierceness of expression suggest the prevalence of unsettled violent world unwilling to be controlled by principles:

How can those terrified vague fingers push  
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?  
And how can body, laid in that white rush,  
But feel the strange heart beating where it lies? (Yeats, 1989, p.214, lines 5-8)

The image in question represents the all-consuming desire of the "vague fingers" to restrain the victim's "loosening thighs." A cathartic release from suffering and psychological disintegration, this expression allows Yeats's unconscious defences to *act out*

their own pain and achieve a sense of triumph over the poem's tyranny. The poem poses serious challenges to the nation's assumed "civilized" viewpoints, highlights the ineffectiveness of political measures, and criticizes the shortcomings of the recently founded Irish State. This sounds like a harsh critique of the transformations taking place inside the Irish state society. The focus is not on the brutality of the swan (representing the imperial power of Britain) but on Leda's submission (representing the Irish state). Through this approach, the poet challenges the hypocritical moral framework of modern politics and reveals the superficiality that conceals the nature of the violent rivals. Nally (2010) argues that the examined poem weaves together psychological and political elements, most notably through the deliberate reflection of Ireland's restlessness in the depicted events. This link is made clearer by the poet's depiction of a disturbing tension that combines individual and communal suffering. Using intense imagery with the weight of symbolic violence serves to convey an intended subtextual political message. To deal with the deeply disturbing scene, Yeats defensively redirects his emotional explosion into acted-out violence.

Yeats's *Last Poems* poetry collection gives the impression that he is deeply involved in both Irish and international politics. His tone becomes more sceptical and resistant as he sees the flaws in the newly formed Irish State. In "Cuchulain Comforted," Yeats constructs a haunting and peculiar scene of "eyes star[ing] out of the branches" (Yeats, 1989, p. 332, line 3). This horrific fantasy scene, which includes a wounded hero now terrified by his nightmare surroundings and a strange mix of other mortals, is a foreshadowing of the protagonist's imminent death. The poem conveys the hellish experience of living in a hellish place and the terrible grotesque death of a man who was once "violent and famous." The man can no longer endure the pain of the "six mortal wounds" that render him incapable of understanding the reality of the creatures around him. This leads him to "lean upon a tree / As though to meditate on wounds and blood" (Yeats, 1989, p. 332, lines 5-6). The untamed "shrouds" assert their dominance over the injured Cuchulain by compelling him to metamorphose into a shroud-like figure:

'Your life can grow much sweeter if you will  
'Obey our ancient rule and make a shroud;  
Mainly because of what we only know  
The rattle of those arms makes us afraid.  
'We thread the needles' eyes, and all we do  
All must together do.' That done, the man  
Took up the nearest and began to sew. (Yeats, 1989, p. 332, lines 12-18)

In a context where discerning reality from a nightmare becomes exceedingly challenging, Yeats sticks to deploying the protective defence mechanism of fantasy. This becomes clearer when the hero must face his inevitable transformation into a figure embodying both terror and imperfection. Morse and Bertha (1991) support the notion that Yeats's fantasy associations are effectively conveyed through the intricately woven narrative of the poem. They imply that Yeats has successfully fabricated his own reality by fusing creative imagination with fantasy. The transformations of the Shrouds in the poem possess a distinctly fantastic quality. In his later years, Yeats's use of fantasy might not be considered as a hopeless effort to recapture a missing defensive response to what he considers as barely worth defending. The Irish poet recognizes that this may not be the most effective method of relieving his anxiety, but it seems to be his only remaining option. Undeniably, the old poet is able to employ his defence mechanisms and to come up with a fantasy reshaping of the current frightening political scene.

The story of "Cuchulain Comforted" is an affecting reflection of Yeats's worries about the serious and meaningless nature of dishonest national allegiance in Ireland. This is notably exemplified as Yeats portrays the dying hero, Cuchulain, resorting to the psychological mechanism of identification through his empathetic connection with the enigmatic "shrouds". As the poem reaches its conclusion, Cuchulain shows complete agreement not with brave warriors but with the mysterious "cowards" in a striking departure from conventional heroics.

'Now must we sing and sing the best we can,  
But first you must be told our character;  
Convicted cowards all, by kindred slain  
'Or driven from home and left to die in fear.'  
They sang, but had nor human tunes nor words,  
Though all was done in common as before,  
They had changed their throat of birds. (Yeats, 1989, p. 332, lines 19-25)

The closing scene of "Cuchulain Comforted" emphasizes the hero's increasing identification with and conformity to the group's animalistic standards. It portrays the bizarre metamorphosis as the inevitable conclusion to the psychological conflict. This change not only marks a turning point in Cuchulain's personality but also offers a possible answer to the underlying psychological struggle that has plagued him. This interpretation can be understood in the context of Yeats' efforts to mitigate the pervasive sense of violence, although in an antiheroic fashion, as noted by Longley (2012):



The poem's strange course, from 'mortal wounds' to the 'throats of birds,' implies that poetry can do something different from other responses to violence, however marginal, 'outcast,' or downcast it may appear. It cannot really respond with its own violence. It cannot redeem. Yet it can absorb and, in some sense, transfigure. (p. 110)

As Longley elucidates, Yeats's "Cuchulain" undergoes a transformative journey suggestive of mechanisms life fantasy and identification, which act as coping strategies to lessen the attendant's distress. Yeats's attempt to calm the emotional turbulence within the text is embodied by the poem's shift in narrative structure and character development. To achieve this sort of psychological cleansing, Yeats uses a combination of his adaptable poetic style and psychologically constructive mechanisms. By doing so, he seeks relief from the prevailing anxiety of the political landscape.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study has undertaken a critical analysis of the mythical elements present in the poetry of W.B. Yeats, employing Sigmund Freud's theory of ego defense mechanisms. Freud postulated that people, organizations, and nations utilize psychological strategies in an unconscious manner to navigate and adapt to reality, while also preserving a favorable perception of themselves. Despite the potential for these mechanisms to distort reality, Freud and his contemporaries asserted that healthy persons employ a variety of defenses to navigate internal and external challenges.

The unique utilization of myth by Yeats, coupled with its dynamic characteristics, requires an examination of the psychological adaptations he consistently employs to overcome adversities. Through his poetry, Yeats taps into these unconscious mechanisms, thereby expanding his mythic spectrum, thereby exemplifying how human responses can be geared towards self-preservation. Although this psychological reflex does not completely eliminate pain, it potentially alleviates the distress associated with contemporary Irish dilemmas.

According to the research, it is suggested that Yeats's re-engagement with myth serves as an unconscious shield. By blending the mythic past with present realities, the Irish poet devises a form of poetic safeguarding that helps alleviate national discord through reimagined legends. Carrying forth the task of translating contemporary Irish history into myth, Yeats reshapes the defensive tools of communal imagination in its ongoing battle against diverse hardships. The utilization of defensive myth by Yeats serves to shape his understanding of history and politics, while also enhancing the influence of the mythic voice in addressing the socio-cultural complexities of contemporary Ireland. The significance of this study lies in its introduction of a unique perspective about the utilization of myth in poetry, particularly in its portrayal of the psychological tactics employed for self-preservation. Moreover, this study establishes a foundation for further investigations into the determinants that influence poetic responses to societal issues, thereby expanding the discourse on understanding the dynamics between historical contexts and contemporary representations in literary works.

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