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The Significance of Phantasmagoria in the Elegies of W. B. Yeats's the Wild Swans at Coole

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Abstract

This study studies the significance of Yeats's phantasmagoria and discusses its constructive role in the elegies included in The Wild Swans at Coole. Yeats's phantasmagoria is extensive and has multiple facets. It can be traced in various forms in different poems. Its vivid presence can well be noticed in the elegies, personal love lyrics, and philosophical poems of The Wild Swans at Coole. Yeats speaks of the significant role of phantasmagoria in the preface to The Wild Swans at Coole and introduces it a means through which he can express his convictions of the world. The poet, according to Yeats, never speaks directly; there is always a phantasmagoria involved. The term phantasmagoria can be regarded as a key concept in Yeats's The Wild Swans at Coole. A deep interpretation of the elegiac poems of this collection necessitates a close study of the images and symbols constructing the related phantasmagoria.

Keywords: *Phantasmagoric; W.B. Yeats; Lamentation; Elegies; The Wild Swans at Coole*

Introduction

In the preface to *The Wild Swans at Coole*, W.B.Yeats speaks of the significant role of phantasmagoria in his poetry by introducing "the phantasmagoria through which alone I can express my convictions about the world" (qtd. in Murry 1920, p.39). His statement is direct and clear. Right at the beginning, the essential plan and the constructive basis of the whole collection are given. Yeats's statement is suggestive of his angle of vision which can even include the direct transcription of common reality whether found in the sensible world or in the emotion and picture of the mind. According to *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word "phantasmagoria" is a "shifting series of phantasms, illusions, or deceptive appearances, as in a dream or as created by the imagination". It is derived from the word "phantasm which is a fleeting moment, a phantom, and apparition. Phantasmagoria is said to be a multiplicity of phantasms; it introduces the realm of magical vision and heightened perception, of fantasy and dream imagery, of hallucination. Most psychiatrists believe that all human perception is, in fact, hallucinatory in nature and that we synthesize all we hallucinate and call it life. According to Carl Jung, phantasmagoria are archetypal forms, patterns, images and symbols which "codify our perceptual experience and, as art, render it permanent, since the mind2 organizes impressions into archetypal forms that recur in human societies worldwide as they develop over centuries" (qtd. in Coleman 2006).

Objective and Scope of the Study

The purpose of this study is to make some poems from W.B. Yeats's *The Wild Swans at Coole*, particularly the elegies included understandable to the reader on the basis of the images and symbols that construct Yeats's personal phantasmagoria. As Catherine Cook Smith believes, "the idea of the symbol is central in understanding Yeats's poetry" (Smith 1930, p.58). Therefore, the significant symbols of most poems of this collection will be analyzed. Writers and poets, who are also talented in criticism, usually try to practice the philosophy and ideas they put forth in their critical essays. This study tries to illustrate how successful Yeats is in expressing his ideas and emotions in the elegies of *The Wild Swans at Coole* by means of phantasmagoria.

Significance of the Study

The significance of phantasmagoria in Yeats's elegies included in *The Wild Swans at Coole* has not yet discussed in detail by critics while it is indisputable. Yeats himself believes that a poet always talks about his personal life and that there is always a phantasmagoria involved. A study of Yeats's phantasmagoria and the elements that have constructed it, i.e. images, icons and symbols are indispensable in the reader's attempt to get insight into his poetry.

Review of Literature

Yeats's collection *The Wild Swans at Coole*, published in 1919, marks a turning point in the trajectory of his poetic career. At the time of its publication, Yeats was already well-known and, as C.K. Stead states, was "widely regarded as the most important living poet writing in English" (Stead 1986, p.13). Richard Ellmann, a great critic of Yeats's poetry and plays, in his prominent book *The Identity of Yeats* discusses the phantasmagoric and symbolic structures found in his works. As he states, phantasmagoria designated for Yeats that structure of related images through which he expressed himself and through which as he himself once said, "the dream and the reality face one another in visible array" (62). He also goes on to trace two symbolic and phantasmagoric structures in his works: the first built up from his boyhood and is retained until after 1900, the other appearing mainly from 1915 to 1929. As Ellmann believes, a clearly articulated structure is missing in the poems composed from about 1903 to about1914. The power of the second symbolic structure is noticeably abated from about 1935 to his death in 1939.

The years before and during the composition of the poems of *The Wild Swans at Coole* were hard times for Yeats; a series of catastrophic personal, national and international events took place, all of which had a role in forming the framework of the poems ultimately arranged in this collection. The first world war, the death of Hugh Lane, the violent outbreak of Easter 1916, the dismemberment of Lady Gregory's estate, the death of Maud Gonne's husband, Maud Gonne's and her daughter's rejection of him, his marriage and the death of Robert Gregory left a great impact on Yeats's life and poetry. He started to view the real world as a complicated drama in which he was assigned no prominent role, for recourse he turned to his imaginative world of images and symbols, i.e., phantasmagoria. As John Unterecker, another great critic of Yeats's poetry, in his *A Reader's Guide to William Butler Yeats* observes, the design of the poems of *The Wild swans at Coole* is "Death, life, and the patterns of Life and Death" (131).Yeats's masks transferred from his phantasmagoria into the poems of this collection are also introduced as "survivor, Defeated Lover, and Scholar. The progression is from uncomplicated personal statement to an elaborate presentation of the intricate image on which *A Vision* is founded" (131).

Graham Martin's criticism of Murry's understatement of Yeats's poetry in his *Countries of the Mind* is also noticeable. In his essay "The Wild Swans at Coole", he proves it being mere misjudgments by referring to some quite helpful facts from both Yeats's life and his poetry. He focuses primarily on Murry's description of Yeats's state of mind while composing the poems of the collection, i.e. on the

statement that he "has the apparatus, but no potency in his soul" (qtd. in Martin 54). Martin believes that though it is generally admitted that some of the poems of *The Wild swans at Coole* express exhaustion or defeat, and one or two others complain of the sacrifices which the artist had to demand of the man, "Murry's sweeping diagnosis rests on more than these poems" (54); he considers the whole collection. He goes on to comment on Murry's statement that "He is empty now" (Murry 1920, p.45) by claiming that "in the case of *The Wild swans* [*at Coole*] it quickly becomes evident that the poems Murry reviewed are much too various to express anything simple or definite about Yeats in1918-19 without, at least, certain preliminaries" (54).

In defense of *The Wild Swans at Coole'*s structure, Martin first distinguishes between two editions of the poems: a Cuala edition of twenty-nine poems and the play "At the Hawk's Well", published in1917; and a Macmillan edition of forty-six poems, published in 1919. He states that the omission of "Easter 1916" from both volumes and the intentional delay in publishing some personal poems written before 1917 bespeaks of the fact that "Yeats's book-making was no casual affair" (Martin 1966, p.55). Pursuing this approach, John Unterecker's commentary on the volume also assumes that "the order of the poems expresses a meaningful design--'Death, Life, and the patterns of Life and Death' " (qtd. in Martin 1966, p. 55). Graham Martin also observes that the forty-six poems of the Macmillan volumes are written over seven years from January 1912 to January-February 1919. Not only is this the longest span covered by a single collection, but also it comes from a period when Yeats's poetry was blossoming amidst its most radical developments. Taking all the afore-mentioned preliminaries into consideration, Murry's statement, i.e., "He is empty now" (45) seems to flicker away.

A. Norman Jeffares, a truly eminent critic of Yeats's poetry, in his comprehensive *A New Commentary on the Poems of W.B.Yeats,* states that the main intellectual interest of *The Wild Swans at Coole* lies in the poems it includes which occasionally deal with the system of *A Vision*. As he believes, Yeats, in part, "regained his poetic energy(whose loss he had lamented in *The Green Helmet*) by using poetry as a vehicle for his strange thoughts [i.e., his personal phantasmagoria] and for his own personal life" (Jeffares 1984, p.129). He goes on to give a description of some of the features of the poems in *The Wild Swans at Coole.* He believes that beside the innovations in subject matter, they reveal Yeats's developing use of ancestors and friends as subjects for poetry: "he is now more prepared to delineate details of personality just as he is to use personal names" (130).

Balachandra Rajan's opinion of *The Wild Swans at Cool,* which is expressed in his *W.B. Yeats: A Critical Introduction*, is no less significant than others'. As he believes, the collection stands judiciously balanced between the sense of withering away and its growing knowledge of the truth. *The Wild Swans at Coole* begins with"the muted melancholy of the title poem and ends with the bleak ambivalences of the "Double Vision of Michael Robartes. . .it moves through the deaths of friends and the persistence of love to a harsher world which the light of the vision dominates" (Rajan 1965, p.107).

According to Jahan Ramazani, death was W. B. Yeats's muse, and his best poems are his meditations on loss and decay. In his immensely learned book, *Yeats and the Poetry of Death: Elegy, Selfelegy, and the Sublime*, Ramazani reviews Yeats's elegies, self-elegies in the sublime mode. He also analyses Yeats's love lyrics with close revisionist readings of his individual poems, and traces interrelations between the lyrics and the traditions that inspired them.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Phantasmagoria, originating from the poet's visionary imagination, is a key concept in Yeats's *The Wild swans at Coole*. Therefore, a study of this concept and the related images and symbols as its components can lead to a deeper interpretation of the elegies and elegiac poems of this collection, its titled poem in particular. The analysis of the phantasmagoric images and symbols of the poems, reveals both the poet's mind and its development. Applying eclectic approach to this study is quite helpful, since it makes room for analyzing the poems from different angles and scopes.

Discussion

Phantasmagoria

As Yeats believes, the poet has always his phantasmagoria, his personal imaginative world of ideas and emotions; it is not important whether the elements of this phantasmagoria are the mythologies of a Homer or Dante, the characters chosen from romance and history of a Shakespeare or even the moods and emotions of Yeats himself. The message Yeats tries to bring home is that the poet's personal phantasmagoria and that of his poems will be the same and that the object it creates will be identical, in the same as the "golden bird" of "Sailing to Byzantium" is both poet and his works. What Yeats, as a critic, emphasizes in his idea of phantasmagoria is the objects, the images and the icons which can give pattern and meaning to experience. As he himself believes, his phantasmagoria absorbs the mass of sensations produced by the writer and his work; it reproduces them in its own iconography and patterns, "its own phenomenology on the written page, creating a verbal structure analogous to the phantasmagoric process, the argumentation of the5 critical statement paralleling the mental process of the critic" (Fallis 1976, p. 72).

Yeats states that the memory is evoked through consciousness, moments of trance, contemplation or "the moment when we are both asleep and awake." He adds that, "in making and understanding of a work of art, and the more easily if it is full of patterns and symbols and music, we are lured to the threshold of sleep" (32). Yeats proclaims that poets in moments of contemplation, receive the "creative impulse from the lowest of the nine Hierchies, and so make and unmake mankind . . .for does not 'the eye altering alter all?'" (31) As Wilson states, "Yeats believed in a collective unconscious which would operate to suggest his archetypal meaning to all readers" (13). Yeats's use of private symbols in his personal phantasmagoria and poetry is rooted in his growing interest in mysticism, magic and occult theologies of the Hermetic and Kabalistic tradition. Images and symbols play an important role in the composition of Yeats's poems. It is the fact of which the poet is quite aware, for in "Ego Dominus Tuus", he hints at that when he says, "I seek an image, not a book/ Those men that in their writings are most wise/ Own nothing but their blind, stupefied hearts" (Yeats 1994, p.134). He explains it best in "Upon a dying Lady": "I have no speech but symbol, the pagan speech I made/ Amid the dreams of youth" (133). It should be noted that though insistence on mystery has its own haunting beauty about it, more often than not, it results in the obscurity in language, especially with the system of symbols in which the correspondence between a concrete term and its associations seems private to the artist.

In his "The Symbolism of Poetry", Yeats talks about two types of symbols, i.e., emotional and intellectual symbols. Emotional symbols stimulate the reader's emotion, that is, they can make the reader feel either attracted or disgusted through the images evoked by the symbol. Under the spell of such symbols, the reader is so peculiarly moved that even he himself cannot tell. Intellectual symbols, on the other hand, evoke ideas alone or ideas blended with emotions. They are primarily there to invade the mind of the reader with the idea that the poet has in mind. As Yeats believes, "if the symbols are merely emotional, the reader gazes from amid the accidents and destinies of the world, but if the symbols are intellectual too, he becomes himself a part of pure intellect, and he is himself mingled with the procession" (33). He apparently prefers symbols that are both intellectual and emotional. Intellectual symbols convey wisdom and such symbols never become old, the more they are used, the richer they become. For his symbols, Yeats rarely gives direct references. He makes use of Greek, Roman and Christian mythology in his poems to signify his symbols. He also has his "personal mythology and a related symbolism, partly in the manner of Blake" (Henn 1965, p.123).

The Phantasmagoric Lamentation

W. B. Yeats's phantasmagoria plays a decisive role in his elegies, for the elegies included in *The Wild Swans at Coole*, i.e. , "The Wild Swans at Coole", "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory", "Upon Dying Lady" and "Lines Written in Dejection".do owe their beauty and strength to the apt phantasmagoric images and symbols constructing them. A close study of these images and symbols is

highly suggestive, for it helps reveal Yeats's fortifying elegiac elements designed in a way as to attain his poetic purposes. In the years 1916 and 1917, no theorizing about fact and mask, the miracle of transformation, and no autobiographical apologies could hide from Yeats the fact that his personal life was still inadequate. Being fifty years old and utterly cognizant of the loss of his imaginative and power, Yeats felt plagued by an adolescent insecurity. Maud Gonne's final rejection of his proposal added to his bitter feelings of frustration. He was, in fact, an unsettled, sensitive and lonely man in need of companionship. Being an old bachelor with a new style and method, he filled most of his poems composed during these years with phantasmagoric laments for his lost youth. This regretful lament is even put at the center of almost all his elegies written in those years.

It was quite natural for Yeats to start to ponder over old age and meditate on his lost youth. In October 1916, he finished composing the poem "The Wild Swans at Coole" with the theme of old age put at its very center. According to Curtis B. Bradford, "in this characteristic work, Yeats uses what is nearest to him and most familiar, a walk along Coole water, to express a universal state of mind and emotion" (48). In the first speculation of the poem, as Richard Ellmann states in

The Identity of Yeats, "the fifth stanza came after the second" (153) and the third stanza was put at the end. As Ellmann believes, by doing so, Yeats "emphasized his personal deprivation in time and made possible the symbolic reading that his awakening would be his death, a paradox well within his intellectual boundaries" (253). Ronald Schuchard in his essay "Hawk and Butterfly: The Double Vision of *The Wild Swans at Coole*", traces some signs of the liberation of visionary imagination, "the transference of rational thoughts into magical images, the recovery of a joy and an ecstasy that had abandoned his poems for over a decade" (211). Schuchard describes *The Wild Swans at Coole*, as Yeats's Prufrock volume in which his poetic sensibility is tormented by a growing consciousness of age, by his awareness of a higher plane of existence that is presently inaccessible to him, by an intense awareness of an intellectual and emotional predicament from which he is powerless to extricate himself. (212)

In order to construct an effective phantasmagoric lament in "The Wild Swans at Coole", Yeats invites to his phantasmagoria, "the trees in their autumn beauty", the dry woodland paths, the October twilight, a still sky and the brimming water and he inserts the sensual beauty of nine-and-fifty swans, for the aging Yeats views the wild swans as unaging. Yeats believes that symbols can possess several different meanings. His use of the swan symbol perfectly illustrates his view of symbols. The speaker of the poem, i.e., the "I", regardless of its being dramatic or biographical, perceives the swans as lovers that possess the passion and vigor of he is deprived. In his phantasmagoria, the swans are also his lost youth and the repetitive act of counting them keeps him in an illusory contact with it. The brief phantasmagoric encounter collapses the moment the swans lift from the lake and he loses his transient hold over the swans, for the swans will be to some other "lake's edge or pool" (Yeats 1994, p. 107) and delight some other men's eyes, not the speaker's. The swans' flight reminds him of his present state, he can no longer command the birds; he is rather commanded by them. The phantasmagoric nostalgia steps in to make him lament the loss once more:

But now they drift on the still water

Mysterious, beautiful;

Among what rushes will they build,

By what lake's edge or pool

Delight men's eyes when I awake some day

To find they have flown away? (167)

The perception "When I awake some day / To find they have flown away", is broken off by Yeats's phantasmagoric lament for his broken heart: "I have looked upon those brilliant creatures / And

now my heart is sore" (Yeats 1994, p. 107). As Herbert J. Levine believes, "Yeats prefers to keep the swans floating on the lake, where he can continue to possess what is left to him of their special meaning" (419). The movement of the swans, i.e., paddling or climbing are not so significant as the contrast they make with the poet's poignant mind and their companionable hearts, which unlike that of the solitary poet, have not grown old. This very idea that for the wild swans "Passion or conquest, wander where they will/ Attend upon them still" (Yeats 1994, p.107), ignites the relentless memory of an out-of-reach ideal past but it is instantly quenched when the present view of his filled with self-pity steps in.

In the self-elegiac "The Wild Swans at Coole", the poet tries to count the swans setting in motion the mental operation that "kant describes as the mathematical sublime" (Ramazani 1990, p.116), but the act of counting stops the moment the swans mount above the poet. They transport his mind "with an intimation of incalculable aggregates" (116) which leads only to his lamentable fall from the dream of the sublime into self-pity. The "nine-and-fifty" (107) swans are placed against "the nineteen autumns" in the phantasmagoric picture formed in the poet's mind.

Unlike the speaker himself, the swans seem to have remained unchanged and "unwearied still"; They will not accompany him for a long time ; that is the fact that he, sadly enough, comes to realize. They, however, linger enough to pose a question for the reader: Why should the number of the wild swans directly referred to in the last line of the first stanza be exactly "nine and- fifty"? Apparently, the number fifty-nine does not refer to any personal concern of Yeats, such as his age.

As Joseph F. Vogel states , "the number fifty-nine occurs in no well-known poems-perhaps in no poems- except 'Thomas Rymer' and 'The Wild Swans at Coole' gives added grounds for thinking that Yeats derived it from the ballad and perhaps even intended to allude to the ballad" (298). According to Francis J. Child, when Thomas meets "the queen of fair Elfland", who escorts him away to live in her domain, he notices that "At ilka telle of her horse's mane/Hung fifty silver bells and nine" (qtd. in Vogel 1968, p.298).

The allusion to the ballad "Thomas Rymer" highlights the affinity felt between the ballad and "The Wild Swans at Coole". The speaker's enchantment with the beautiful and mysterious swans and his later recognition of the fact that the treacherous time separates him from their company is not much unlike Thomas's meeting with the lovely queen "followed by his learning that after seventy years he will have to leave the world of the fairies" (Vogel 1968, p. 299). The very correspondence between "The Wild Swans at Coole" and the ballad gives enrichment to the meaning of "now my heart is sore" (Yeats 1994, p.107). In his phantasmagoric lament, the speaker recalls his first joy and concludes the fairyland atmosphere with later poignant expectation of loss. Thomas's sad departure from the lovely queen of the fairyland can be felt in the speaker's concluding prediction that he "will awake some day to find the swans have flown away". Beside the lost youth, the speaker's own death can also be inferred from the sad departure from the swans.

The constant and recurrent visits made to the Coole Park are faced with the imminent threat of decay, for the "bell-beat of their wings" that once brought him exaltation, now rings the warning bells for him: a phase of life is ending. The recognition of the difference between the speaker's status and that of the wild swans is now gained. He has looked upon the "brilliant creatures" and now his heart is sore, for nothing is the same as it used to be nineteen years ago when he was a young vigorous man with his own vehement passion not much unlike the wild swans:

They paddle in the cold
Companionable streams or climb the air;
Their hearts have not grown old;
Passion or conquest, wander where they will,
Attend upon them still. (107)

The Significance of the Swan as a Symbol

The symbolic significance of the swans can by no means be overlooked, for the swan is the symbol of a great complexity. The swan "always points to the complete satisfaction of a desire, the swansong being a particular allusion to desire which brings about its own death" (Cirlot 1962, p. 306). The affinity between Yeats's swan and Thomas Rymer's fairy queen can be best felt in Bachelard's description of the white swan: "in poetry and literature it is an image of a naked woman, of chaste nudity and immaculate whiteness" (qtd. in Cirlot 1962, p. 506). To Helen Sword, "swans are graceful, like the rhythms of poetry; white like an unwritten page; romantic, singing only at the moment of death" (320). The swan connotes purity, strength and immortality; it is the emblem of godhead and "receives its significance as the symbol of inspiration" (Melchiori 1961, p.140). As George Brandson believes, " Swans are emblematical of triumphant love-unwearied, mysterious, beautiful, not grown old at heart- in contrast to human beings who are subject to decay and mutation" (254).

The wild swans, in a sense, stand for the life-force, for their hearts "have not grown old" (Yeats 1994, p.107). They are also vigorous; they do not just fly through the air, they rather "climb the air" (107). They "wander where they will" (107), for don't they possess and rule "passion or conquest" which is absent to the once-young speaker? They also stand for the poet's muse and inspiration, for although he finds them gone when he is awaken from his phantasmagoric recollection of an ideal past, he still needs their memory for forming both his real and phantasmagoric lament for a lost youth. What makes Yeats's lamentation of old age the more interesting is "the suggestion that the power of poetry has deserted the poet is probably offered in order to be rejected by the poem" (Rajan 1965, p.108). The message Balachandra Rajan tries to bring home is that the poet's power of imagination can stay fresh and vigorous as that of the wild swans and can even surpass them by soaring higher than the borders of the mind in the realm of phantasmagoria.

Besides a lament for the lost youth, the nostalgic "The Wild Swans at Coole" can also be described as "a lament over estrangement from a self passionately attached to the feminine: nineteen years ago at Coole he was desperately in love [with Maud Donne], but 'All's changed' "

(Ramazani 1990, p. 144). The poet's phantasmagoria at this point dwells more on a self lost rather than on a beloved lost, for he is now old, weary and companionless. Yeats's visit made to Coole Park and his failure to make a compromise between the present state and the gone past is quite reminiscent of Wordsworth's "Line Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" in which Wordsworth returns to the banks of the Wye to discover that he can no longer feel the same passion and vehement feeling he once had tasted in youth for he has learnt:

To look on nature, not as in the hour

Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes

The still, sad music of humanity (Wordsworth 1944, p. 68).

The similarity of the beginning of "The Wild Swans at Coole" and that of "Lines written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey", however, does not go beyond creating the expectation of recompense, for unlike the latter, the former fails to meet the expectation. The fact that the moment is held in a state of "autumn beauty" (Yeats 1899, p. 107) hints at the speaker's recognition of a specific incarnation of beauty that is cherished by him only because he has cultivated a deep intimate relationship with the region , during those nineteen autumns. All the scenes and episodes, regardless of their sublimity, might be a mere image or vision formed by nostalgia and rendered into poignant phantasmagoria. The last stanza bespeaks of gloom and failure. Although elements of elegizing the lost love and youth make "The Wild Swans at Coole" doubly elegiac, the real poignant point comes with the threat of the loss of desire and imagination from which he drives the substantial elements for constructing his personal phantasmagoria through which alone he can express his convictions. The threat is implied in "When I awake some day to

find they have flown away?" (Yeats1899 , p.107). If the swans' flight be taken as the departure of the hope of relating and elevating to the sublimity from the poet, the poet's ".awake some day" (107) might also connote his mode of imagination and the emotional defeat at the age of fifty-one.

Although the young Yeats wrote few formal elegies, his early works seem to be replete with elegiac pathos which makes his work much similar to many contemporary late Romantic contemporaries. The mature Yeats, however, resisted some of the governing conventions of elegy when he composed poetry in this genre. Although most English elegists lament the death of an individual with high pathos, Yeats tends to tame pathos to an acceptable extent, and he commemorates the death of a group and not one single person. No account of Yeats's phantasmagoric lament in his elegies would be complete without some mention of the deep images and symbols of the greatest poem of *The Wild Swans at Coole* collection, i.e, "In Memory of the Major Robert Gregory". This elegy, as Graham Martin believes, "is not only (and perhaps even not primarily) a matter for grief, and its formal structure contributes something further than dramatic detachment peror an appropriate decorum" (Martin 1961, p. 70). As Yeats grew older, he focused more on the meaning of life and the inevitability of death. He, with increasing horror, witnessed the death-toll of relatives and friends. Life became for Yeats, as it is for most sensitive people, "a kind of catalogue of dying; and he tried, examining all those deaths, to extract from dying faces and from dying statements insights into universal patterns" (Unterecker 1967, p. 144).

Although in the poem "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory" the setting shifts from Lady Gregory's estate at Coole Park upstream to Yeats's tower, the subject is still the mortal man and the poet's focus is on the Gregorys. "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory" can be considered as one of Yeats's finest achievements or as Amy G. Stock calls it, "the most genuinely commemorative of all the great English elegies" (qtd. In Perloff 1966, p.307). This poem gets much of its power from Yeats';s genuine personal feeling that helps him manage to extend the subject from the death of Robert Gregory to a universal one, i.e., "the death of young heroes". A contrast between the dead and the living, and between the painful and the familiar loss can be noticed in this elegy. In the world where the speaker's life and living friends are just involved in mourning the loss or mere "talk" or "quarrels", the dead evoke the poet's memory and phantasmagoria. Major Robert Gregory's death is indeed strong enough to set Yeats's phantasmagoria at work and help him elegize his dear friend's dear son's death through a phantasmagoric lamentation.

Although the first two stanzas of the elegy are in no direct relationship to the dead and the loss, they properly enough help the poet's mind to focus on his dead friends: "For all that comes into my mind are dead" (Yeats 1994, p. 108). Yeats himself once stated that, "The dead at times outface a living rival" (qtd. in Ramazani 1990, p. 41). It is, in fact, their very absence that has made the dead friends dominate the poet's memory and engender the poem. The dead cannot come in at eye or ear, instead they come into the mind alone which can obliquely be suggestive of the fact that phantasmagoria manages to work vigorously even in the absence or death of its object.

Major Robert Gregory's death is not the only death referred to in the poem, for in the following stanzas, one comes across the names of his other dead friends, i.e., Lionel Johnson, John Synge, and George Pollexfen. Apparently, the death of the latter does no longer call for mourning, for they are all put in the dispassionate "old picture-book" (Yeats 108). Yeats seems to have made himself even more accustomed to their once-painful death through fixing them in lifeless pictures. The thought of Major Robert Gregory suddenly lifts the poem from the "breathless faces" (Yeats 108) perceived in his friends into a different rhetorical register. The fresh loss of his splendid friend provides space enough for imagination to be at work afresh and produce the needed phantasmagoria.

The poet prepares the reader to get involved with the speaker's phantasmagoric lamentation by means of elegiac repetition, allusion, and hyperbolic descriptions in describing Gregory: "My dear friend's dear son/ Our Sydney and our perfect man" (Yeats 109). In the next stanzas, the poet is drawn away from dry calculations about his friends to a phantasmagoric encounter with the landscape:

For all things the delighted eye now sees

Were loved by him; the old storm-broken trees

That cast their shadows upon road and bridge;

The lower set on the stream's edge;

The fond where drinking cattle make a stir

Nightly, and startled by that sound

The water-hen must change her ground;

He might have been your heartiest welcomer (Yeats 109).

An imaginary excitement is introduced to us through "Delight" which can be considered as a key term here; it is through Gregory's absence that the poet's "delighted eye" can see "the old broken trees", the tower" and "the ford". It is, however, Death that turns the poet from his customary access to the familiar scene and provides him with a mental space through which he re-encounters his estate, which is defamiliarized. In his phantasmagoria, the poet perceives the new imaginative life that Gregory's death has added to the scene. The verbs used for describing "the cattle" and "water-hen", i.e., "stir", "startled", and "change" all bespeak of a change that is there because of Gregory's absence. The whole setting is now characterized by "shadows", "sounds", "trees"", "cattle" and "the water-hen". It is animate, since in death Gregory can be the poet's "heartiest welcomer". The "tower" which is mentioned together with other images in the first stanza is highly symbolic; the idea of elevation or ascent related to Major Robert Gregory's estate is implicit in the image of the tower. The "tower", in fact, connotes height or the act of rising above the common level of life.

In Yeats's early sketches, "the tower" has even been used together with a disappearing river to form a mere romantic background for a love story, but in "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory", it is closely linked with Gregory, for the young man's death occurred when he was about to make "the tower" his permanent home. The unexpected death of the young man deformed Yeats's happy expectation for having Gregory as his neighbor, counselor and friend after moving to his new home in the old tower. The sad changed circumstances, however, resulted in composing an elegy perfect for his purposes. "The tower" had long been the symbol that Yeats loved. In this elegy, it stands in a new and different configuration. In Yeats's experience, "the tower" is suggestive of what Shelley's tower was to him, i.e., of "the mind looking outward upon men and things" (qtd. in Witt 115).

Gregory's death seems to have crystallized some specific symbols in Yeats's mind. If the "winding stair" be regarded as the gyres of history on which the different generations climb, the "stream" on whose edge the tower is set as " the mind looking inward upon itself" (Witt 115), can be representative of the World Memory or Anima Mundi. Some of the special objects referred to in this poem, i.e., the "tower" and the "winding stair" which form the concrete setting of this elegy, turn out to be the dominant symbols which serve as titles for two of Yeats's greatest volumes of poetry in his later poetry.

In the course of this elegy, Yeats dramatizes his relationship with the dead. The poet's implied transcendence, which is signified by irony and evaluation, becomes tangible. The contrast Yeats tries to depict between the two groups of the dead, i.e., between Johnson, Synge, Pollexfen on one hand, and Major Robert Gregory one the other, can be regarded as his tactic used in order to make the elegy and lamentation more effective. Johnson, Synge and Pollexfen are dead, but not just now, for even when alive, they seemed to be suffering from a kind of death-in-life. The image given of Johnson is that of a "much falling" (Yeats 108) figure who was all the time obsessed with his dreams and was buried in his "Greek and Latin learning" (Yeats 108). Synge, who "never could have rested in the tomb" (Yeats 108) is

also dying with his life spent as a search and preparation for death. Even "the "old uncle" with all his muscular horsemanship, is nothing but "sluggish and contemplative" (Yeats 109) before death.

When it comes to Major Robert Gregory, Yeats fuses in him all the good qualities of his older lost friends, i.e., "Johnson as the scholar, Pollexfen as the horseman, and Synge as the artist. . ." (Rajan 1965, p.109). Gregory is even compared with the great hero of the Renaissance, i.e., Sir Philip Sidney, also a warrior and an artist:

I am accustomed to their lack of breath,

But not that my dear friend's dear son,

Our Sidney and our perfect man,

Could share in that discourtesy of death. (Yeats 109)

The repetition of "soldier, scholar, horseman, he" in the tenth and eleventh stanzas helps start a more elegiac movement in the poem, since the repetitions are both rhythmic and verbal and act as a bold device, which is, as Pete Ure believes, "completely successful in slowing down the pace to a more formal and melancholy strain" (40). Yeats also counts Gregory's several accomplishments: "He rode a race without a bit? /And yet his mind outran the horses' feet" (Yeats 109). His skillfully riffing a race and his being a great painter imply the different facets of Gregory's character, i.e., his being both a man of action and an artist.

In the eleventh stanza of the poem, Yeats raises Gregory's state so high as the "life's epitome". He concludes the stanza with regretting the loss of Major as a young blossoming hero: "What made us dream that he could comb grey hair?"(Yeats 110). In the last stanza of the poem the speaker, however, distances himself from the lost heroes and focuses on some general and universal issues. The images used there aptly bespeak of bitterness. The bitter "wind" that "shakes the shutter" (Yeats 110) is symbolically "credited with the power of fecundation and regeneration"; it is also "reckoned to possess certain evil powers" (Cirlot 1962, p.350).

A "triumphant victory" can be traced in Gregory's death, if the eleventh stanza be treated in isolation. Though the given images of that burning "damp faggots" and "grey hair" are unpleasant and do not go together with the magnificent image of "soldier, scholar, horseman, he, / As't were all life's epitome."(Yeats 110), they help the poet bring home his message:

Some burn damp faggots, others may consume

The entire combustible world in one small room

As though dried straw, and if we turn about

The bare chimney is gone black out

Because the work had finished in that flare. (Yeats 110)

The words and images used in the eleventh stanza seem to be reminiscent of what Yeats wrote on John Davidson in "Tragic Generation":

I think he might have grown to be a successful man . . .

Violent energy, which is like a fire of straw; consumes in a few minutes the nervous vitality, and is useless in the arts. Our fire must burn slowly, and we must constantly turn away to think, constantly analyze what we have done, be content even to have little life outside our work". (qtd. in Jeffares 138)

Thus "fire" becomes the elegy's central image; it is mentioned in a different form right at the beginning of the poem, i.e., the "fire of turf". Fire is a very meaningful symbol. It is, like water, a symbol of transcendence and regeneration. Gaston Bachelard considers the concept of fire as the alchemists do, i.e., as "an element which operates in the center of all things" (qtd. in Cirlot 101) and as a unifying and stabilizing factor. Though fire is ultra-life and can "embrace both good (vital heat) and bad (destruction and conflagration), (101), the desire to annihilate time and bring all things to their end is symbolized by fire in this elegy.

In Yeats's phantasmagoria, Gregory's death is conceived of as "a kind of self-immolation, to which the young man moved as he increasingly realized that the disparate elements of his being could never form a final unity" (Witt 120). The shock and grief remains for Yeats to see a man of such great promise, with all his achievement still before him fail to combine the qualities of the man of action with those of the artist; Gregory's work was finished, his death certain.

The speaker who stands for the artist and has survived the threats of the world of the men of action, is now sitting "Beside a fire of turf in the ancient tower" (Yeats 110). He is the one who is far from consuming "The entire combustible world in one small room" (Yeats 110). Major Robert Gregory's work "had finished in that flare" (Yeats 110) whereas the speaker has managed to adapt himself to the creed stated by Yeats in "The Tragic Generation", that is, to "conserve our vitality, to keep our mind enough under control and to make our technique sufficiently flexible for expression of the emotions of life as they arise" (qtd. in Perloff 320). The speaker, i.e., the artist who has survived the nervous struggles of youth, is a burner of "damp faggots"; his art and his flexible technique make his fire burn slowly.

It is in the last stanza that the elegy's lament becomes obvious. The isolated "I" steps in and replaces the first-person plural and the tone becomes very personal:

I had thought, seeing how bitter is that wind

That shakes the shutter, to have brought to mind

All those that manhood tried, or childhood loved

Or boyish intellect approved,

With some appropriate commentary on each,

Until imagination brought

A fitter welcome; but a thought

Of that late death took all my heart for speech (Yeats 110).

The image of the "bitter wind" introduces the note of personal grief with which "the elegy concludes after a brief recapitulation of 'all those that manhood tried' (Synge), 'or childhood loved' (Pollexfen), "Or boyish intellect approved' (Johnson)" (Perloff 320). The speaker tries to make an "appropriate commentary" on all his dead friends, but the memory of Gregory's death is so pitiful because of the recognition of the young man's unrealized potential that silences all speech in a final moment of grief without comfort.

In the the poems of the sequence "Upon a Dying Lady' Yeats is watchful not to get entrapped in what he calls "submersion in pure sorrow" (qtd. in Ramazani 27). The subject of the seven poems of the sequence "Upon a Dying Lady" is the painter Aubery Beardsley's sister, Mabel, who died of cancer in her early fifties. "Upon a Dying Lady" treats death not as just everyman's natural end, but as an imminent threat to live with. This general condition is made explicit through fatal illness in the poems of this sequence. Yeats restrains the pathos of his pre-mourn elegy for Mabel Beardsley by containing within it a

defensive joy. Beside the unusual joy, which is usually not included in the elegies, the seven poems in this sequence are much more traditional than Yeats's other elegies. The speaker of the poems mourns the death of one single person and the poems "rearticulate such major conventions of the genre as the apostrophic offering" (Ramazani 28). The length of the lines in the poems of this sequence expands from one poem to another and then narrows. As for the number of the lines, it alternately exceeds or falls short of its predecessor in each poem. The poet's phantasmagoric images are present from the first poem to the last one of the sequence.

In the first poem of the sequence, i.e., "Her Courtesy", the elegist imagines the dying lady as a peculiar kind of joyful hero. All the phantasmagoric images of the first poem bespeak of a peaceful preparation for death. The speaker skillfully lessens the bitterness of brooding death by including vivid and full-of-life images like "distinguished grace", "red hair", "rouge on the pallor of her face", "laughter-lit" eyes, "a wicked tale" and of course "her wit". In the poet's phantasmagoria, the dying lady's "lovely piteous head" is observed "amid dull red hair". The poignant air that hovers about "piteous" and "dull" is thus softened and even to some extent enlivened by mere mentioning "red hair". There are many considerations bearing upon the meaning of the color "red" which is the color of pulsing blood and fire. The color red, more often than not, stands for the surging and tearing emotions. According to Cirlot, the color red symbolizes the attributes of Mars, that is, "passion, sentiment and the life-giving principle" (Cirlot 1962, p.52). The lady's "laughter-lit" eyes catch her mourning friends' "sad gaze"; she challenges their "broken-hearted wit" with her playful wit. This joyful heroine that playfully "vies" with her mourning friends, responses to death by her resolute acceptance of taking it as it is. It appears as though she decidedly challenges the friends to triumph over grief. To Yeats, as it is to Heidegger, death seems to "afford 'an unshakable joy' if seized as one's own. Death offers such joy in part because it permits one to unify one's life" (Ramazani 1990, p. 29). In her vying with the friends who surround her, the lady purposefully attempts to defeat the brooding silence that death imposes when it approaches.

In the second poem of the sequence, i.e., "Certain Artists Bring her Dolls and Drawings", some other phantasmagoric images are introduced: "a new modeled doll" and "drawing". In the poet's phantasmagoria, some artists are decreed to bring the dying lady "a new modeled doll" or "drawing / With a friend's or an enemy's/ Features. . ." (Yeats 132). The upcoming death of the young lady is implied in the images used. Symbolically, the speaker tries to make Death mistake "a doll" or "drawing" for the young lady. The doll's being "a new modeled" one also suggests Mabel's being too young to die. The "toys" referred to in the last line of this poem are symbols of temptation. According to Diel, this is the meaning when in Greek Mythology, "the Titans offer toys to the infant Dionysus" (qtd. in Cirlot 327). Dionysus, in Greek Mythology, is:

> The son of the god Zeus and the mortal woman, Semek (daughter of Cadmus of Thebes). Hera gets the Titans to lure the infant with toys, and then they rip him to shreds eating everything but his heart which is saved by either Athena, Rhea, or Demeter". (Encyclopedia Mythica)

The dying lady's high spirits and vivacious mentality are also hinted at in her red hair's flowing "over some silken dress"(Yeats 132). Her dress's being "cut in the Turkish fashion" or "like a boy's" provides her with the exotic air enough to add to the appeal of the dying lady. Thus, mourning the death of such peculiar young heroine of an "unshakable joy is made more effective. The phrase "our passion" in the tenth line refers to the vivacious lady who stands as the symbol of life and passion. The speaker implicitly reminds us of her being too young to die, for she belongs to this world in the first place not the other world: "We have given the world our passion" (Yeats 132) A phantasmagoric confrontation with death occurs at the end of the poem and the image of "toys" appears once more. In the poet's phantasmagoria, the speaker and the artist are not to let Death take the lady away: "We have naught for death but toys" (Yeats 132). Alluring and tempting death with toys is once more reminiscent of the myth of Dionysus and the Titans. In the poet's phantasmagoria, the speaker and some "certain artists" try to divert Death's attention from the dying lady. This subtle analogy between the lady's death and the myth of Dionysus and the Titans, in fact, aids in forming the poet's phantasmagoric mourning. The speaker

does know that the lady's death is certain, but this symbolic rejection of facts acts as a pre-mourning response to the unshakeable appalling death.

In the fourth poem of the sequence, i.e., "The End of Day", Mabel Beardsley is depicted as a child who is playing. The name of the play, i.e., "Penance" is strongly suggestive of her imminent death. Through the metaphor of play, Yeats finds a reflection of his own mournful play in Mabel's childlike play. Playing which by itself signifies living and its being "Fantastical and wild", hints at the life style Mabel Beardsley had and that she was a promising young actress. Symbolically, she does the act of penance for her only sin, i.e., for living a few years in the world. The act of penance is done mainly to add to the pathetic air. "The End of the Day" refers to the end of her life and that "someone" who "will come from the house and say / Though play is but half done" (Yeats 133), is no one but death itself. The play's being "but half done" suggests her dying young. The last line concludes the poem with the lady's leaving the play, i.e., being about to die. The last line of the poem also interrupts the half-completed work of self-mourning.

Letting the poems of the sequence move swiftly through all events, Yeats designs a play in "Her Courage". In this poem, which is the sixth poem of the sequence, the poet depicts the heroine's ascension to the immortal world of the dead who "laughed into the face of death" (Yeats 133). It is, as Jon Stallworthy states, "the poet who asks that the soul, after death should come face to face with" (Stallworthy 1969, p. 35) a company of great free spirits, "half drawn from history and half from myth: the heroine of the Fenian cycle of Irish myth, i.e., Grania, The imagined cardinal "who might have dying praised the Venetian painter Gigione's luxurious coloration" (Unterecker 1967, p. 146), Achilles, who vehemently faced death after his friend's death, Tamerlane, i.e., Timor and Barhaim " (perhaps Bahram, the 'great hunter' of Fitzgerald's Rubaiyat)" (Unterecker 1967, p.146). Identifying Mabel Beardsley first with Petrolonius and then with a cast of warriors transforms her into a male hero basically to suppress the pathos linked with women's passivity.

The poet seems to be examining the power of his phantasmagoria. When he says "I have no speech but symbols, the pagan speech I Made / Amid the dreams of youth" (Yeats 234). As the speaker believes the heroine, like any of the afore-mentioned heroes, "lived in joy" and by doing so, attracted the only possible mortal equivalent to the immortality offered in the "predestined dancing place" (Yeats 234). Referring to the other world as a "dancing place" is highly suggestive. The image of "dance" is a very meaningful symbol; it is an image of the passage of time, of becoming, and of a given process. It also symbolizes the union of space and time within evolution, for "every dance is a pantomime of metamorphosis" (Cirlot 73).

With the poem "Her Friends Bring Her a Christian Tree", the sequence ends in the quite mode of prayer. Still, the focus is fixed on the power of art to make "death" stay away for a while. If in the other poems of the sequence death is the means by which one joins the immortal, here it is the "great enemy". It is, in fact, the powerful and unshakable authority of death that has changed the tone of the speaker into an apologetical one. He is now asking for death's "pardon", for he has eventually gave up fighting its power: "Pardon, great enemy,/ Without an angry thought/ We've carried in our tree"(Yeats 134). The "tree" they have carried in is of significant value, for the tree is one of the most essential of traditional symbols. The tree denotes "the life of the cosmos: its consistence, growth, prolification, and regenerative processes" (Cirlot 323). It can also be regarded as a symbol for immortality, since it stands for inexhaustible life. Yeats's idea of the symbolic significance of tree in his phantasmagoria seems to be quite similar to Eliade's idea. According to Eliade, "the concept of 'life without death' stands, ontologically speaking, for 'absolute reality'" (qtd. in Cirlot 328). Thus, the tree can be regarded as the center of the world when conceived of as a symbol of "absolute reality".

The Christmas tree, with all the "pretty things" on its gay boughs, acts as the "drawings" and "dolls" do in the poem "Certain Artists Bring Her Dolls and Drawings". Here, the tree is a substitute for the dying lady; the joyful atmosphere is produced once more, for the tree would replace sorrow and death. Since laughing "into the face of Death" sounds quite presumptuous, the speaker apologizes for the

"laughing eye" of the lady. In his phantasmagoric Mourning, which can also be regarded as a self-mourning, the speaker comes to realize that he can never challenge the ultimate authority of Death. He asks on the heroine's behalf for "a little grace", for now humbled and defeated before the "great enemy", he eventually acknowledges the bitter reality, i.e., "It is about to die" (Yeats 134).

In "Lines Written in Dejection" and "The Wild Swans at Coole", the speaker regards his growth as a lamentable fall. These two self-elegiac poems of Yeats seem to adhere more closely to the melancholy of some Romantic farewell to youth, such as the poems "Immortality Ode" and "Lines Written a Few Mile Above Tintern Abbey". The latter portrays Yeats's assumption that he has moved into a solar phase at the age of fifty. The poet surmises that "Banished heroic mother moon and vanished", and all the moon imagery, i.e, "dark leopards", "wild witches", and "holy centaurs" will be replaced by a new " ' masculine' realism, embittered but perhaps (he was wrong) 'timid'" (Unterecker 1967, p.139).

The poem "Lines Written in Dejection" takes its motive from two contrary symbols, i.e., the sun and the moon. In this poem, the sun, the moon and centaur are the symbols that depict particular aspects of Yeats's mind. The "heroic moon" of self-realization has vanished and the "timid sun" of objectivity has to be endured. Attributing self-realization to the moon and objectivity to the sun is rooted in their symbolic nature. The symbolism of the moon is wide in scope and very complex. The phases of the moon are analogous to the seasons of the year and also to the ages in the span of man's life. The moon is also subject to the laws of change and growth, that is, it grows from youth to maturity and from maturity to old age and decline. "Banished heroic mother moon and vanished" (Yeats 121) refers to the speaker's growing from youth to maturity that has resulted in his estrangement from the maternal world of youth. It is implied in the poem that "the active faculties (of reflexion, good judgment or will power) are solar [masculine], while the passive qualities (imagination, sentiment and perception) are feminine. . . " (Cirlot 303).The centaurs, however, are primarily there to resolve the problem of the contrast set between the sun and the moon. As Thomas Parkinson believes, the centaur can be considered as a "unifying and transcending symbol. . . Since the irrational and emotional aspects of Yeats's mind are gone with the moon, we can associate the moon with the animal aspects of the centaur and, by contrast, identify the sun with the human and reasonable aspects" (Parkinson 50).

Now that the speaker is in the solar phase of maturity, he finds himself cut from the lunar phase of youth. Although maturity has brought him good judgment and will power, he feels himself at a loss, for he wrongly assumes that loss of youth brings about loss of imagination. It should not, however, be overlooked that the growth also includes a progress from dream to reality. The "wild witches" who stand for the noble ladies do not cast a spell on the speaker now that he has entered the realm of the "embittered sun" (Yeats 121). He is no longer ruled by the "holy centaurs of the hills", for they are vanished as well. Centaur, according to Cirlot is a "fabulous being, half-man, half-horse" (Cirlot 1962, p.36) which represents the "complete domination of a being by the baser forces" (36). It is also suggestive of "cosmic force, the instincts, or the unconscious uncontrolled by the spirit" (36).

The speaker laments his departure from the lunar phases and mourns his estrangement from the maternal. It is subtly suggested that the speaker feels guilty about the banishment of the moon, for as it is hinted at by the poet, perhaps it is the speaker himself, who by growing mature, has caused the alienation he laments. Now that he is grown old, he "must endure the timid sun" (Yeats 121). Although the bleak realm of the "embittered sun" is de-romanticized and offers him neither "wild witches", nor "noble ladies", it is still far from being "timid". As Balachandra Rajan states, "Timidity is in any case hardly the sun's primary characteristic" (Rajan 1965, p. 111); it is most probably there to suggest that the mature world of the old is devoid of imagination and vital adventures. But one hardly fails to notice that it is the very absence of the things that 'are gone" that necessitates the poet's mind to construct a phantasmagoric lamentation.

Conclusion

This study has endeavored to demonstrate the significance of phantasmagoria as a key concept in W. B. Yeats's elegies included in . The reason why he should introduce his personal phantasmagoria in the preface to the collection *The Wild Swans at Coole*, and begin the collection with weighing heavily on his phantasmagoric images and symbols have been discussed. The theme of yearning and regret for the lost youth that finds expression in the title poem and his elegies have also been analyzed in this study. The deployment of phantasmagoric images and symbols have been discussed in this study.

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