

Scientific Report for SPECTRESS

-- Pawan Kumar

Doctoral Scholar

CES/ SLL&CS/ JNU

Overview:

For my doctoral thesis, I am working on the symbols and philosophy in the later work of W. B. Yeats from an Eastern perspective. I strongly believe that in order to understand Yeats's creative mind, one has to understand and analyze the shift in his political interests, and the unfolding of his increasing interest in esoteric and occult practices during the later phase of his life. Under the SPECTRESS project, I got the opportunity to conduct my archival research at the National Library of Ireland, collect material relevant for my doctoral research, and meet young and seasoned scholars working on Yeats. It also provided me a platform to interact with professors and scholars of literature at Trinity College Dublin, and with researchers from various disciplines at the Long Room Hub. Being the first SPECTRESS scholar (student) from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, I would like to highlight in the ensuing report the significant role that SPECTRESS has played in my research and the enriching experience of my stay in the City of Literature, Dublin.

Detailed Report:

The aim of my doctoral research is to critically interpret the creative system of W.B. Yeats that he proposed in his select works straddling his literary and political life from 1889 to 1939 within a comparative framework, where I try to establish the influence of the Eastern, especially Indian knowledge systems (both philosophical and esoteric traditions) on the work of Yeats. There were many questions whose answers lie hidden in the manuscripts and other archival material on Yeats. A crucial part of my research methodology entailed conducting extensive archival research of Yeats's manuscripts, and when I started my study, I had no roadmap of how I would be able to access these manuscripts. And by came SPECTRESS, a golden opportunity for a Yeats enthusiast and researcher like me!

The scholarship under SPECTRESS is one-of-its-kind which provided me the opportunity to stay in Ireland for six months and access all the archival material by and of Yeats, at length. It was a blessing in disguise, a life-changing opportunity for me, as before SPECTRESS came about, I could not picture myself sitting in NLI and going through the books that Yeats once read, and the first manuscripts of Yeats's works with all his invaluable notes and glosses!

One of my research problems engages with the issue of trauma resulting from the Easter Rising of 1916, World War I, and the impending danger of another World War (which is reflected in his later works, especially in his poem "The Second Coming"), and a detailed investigation of how and why Yeats moved away from active politics and started creating an alternate system in the form of *A Vision* to predict the course of human history, and more specifically, the theory of personality, and an exhaustive analysis of human mind. Often, one resorts to historical, sociological, and psychological approaches to understand trauma. But Yeats was guided by the urge to create a distinct Irish identity by resurrecting ancient Irish folklore and culture, rather than merely engaging in a contemporary analysis of the different faces of trauma. In fact, as mentioned earlier, Yeats adopted a philosophical and prophetic tone in his writings about what this trauma could possibly usher into, thereby using his brand of literature and literary system (which he expounds in *A Vision*) as a potent warning against further violence and trauma.

Some books available at the library of Trinity College that helped me immensely are Yeats's *Vision Papers*, *Yeats's Annual* published by Gill and Macmillan, Elizabeth Cullingford's *Yeats, Ireland and Fascism*, Jonathan Allison's *Yeats's Political Identities: Selected Essays*, Marjorie Howes's *Yeats's Nations Gender, Class and Irishness*, *W.B. Yeats and George Yeats: The Letters* edited by Ann Saddlemyer, to name a few. Needless to say, procuring these books in India would have meant a lot of hassle, time and money.

Additionally, the National Library of Ireland eventually became my den for research and accessing the library collection of Yeats, rare and preserved manuscripts of Yeats's works, and his *Vision Papers* and *Occult Papers*. I must take this opportunity to register my heartfelt gratitude for the staff of NLI, as they made my journey through Yeats's literary world smooth and all the more memorable with their helpful directions, kind assistance and friendly smiles. They were generous enough to let me browse through some of Yeats's books and papers which

were on display in the ongoing Yeats Exhibition. Again, I should reiterate the fact that I could not have thought of going through this collection at such luxury had I gone on a different scholarship of a lesser duration. I could work at my pace during the six months, taking extensive notes as I browsed through the archival material. The fact that the NLI was within a stone's throw away from the Hub also added to my convenience, as I could quickly shuffle between the Hub and the NLI if I needed to attend a talk/seminar at the Hub or meet a scholar/professor at Trinity.

Most critics are of the opinion that in the later phase of his literary career, Yeats moved away from politics. However, my study argues that it should not be read as a case of disillusionment with politics, but a mythical appropriation of his political subjectivity which is evident in the later decades of his life. Yeats was influenced by folk-traditions, magical and mystical practices, occult systems, and especially esoteric knowledge systems of the West as well as the East. Especially during the later phase of his life, there was a flourishing movement, quite experimental indeed, which was taking shape in his mind. Yeats wanted to articulate human experiences through this enterprise. I therefore surmise that his politics got subsumed in his mystical endeavors and metaphorically reincarnated itself in the form of a system, which is political, modernist and to some extent, postcolonial in nature.

Talks and Academic Activities at the National Library of Ireland:

During my stay in Dublin, I also got an opportunity to attend lectures organized by the National Library of Ireland on Yeats, Irish Literature and other interdisciplinary topics. I would like to especially mention two lectures here, one by "The Joseph Hassett Yeats Lecture: Tradecraft, Wizardry, Revolution" by Paula Meehan and "Mr. Yeats Goes to Stratford: Shakespeare's Vision in Yeats's Irish Revival" by Dr. Oliver Hennessey. They were both quite interesting and proposed ideas which led me to think about new possibilities of research which lay hidden in the manuscripts of Yeats's work, thus invigorating me at times when I felt homesick. I also got a chance to converse with Dr. Oliver Hennessey, who completed his research on Yeats from Trinity College Dublin, which turned out to be an enriching experience. My stay also gave me the unforgettable experience of attending the ongoing exhibition on Yeats a couple of times, the memory of which is etched has been etched in my mind forever. Most importantly, these

academic events at NLI gave me a chance to interact with highly experienced researchers and Yeats experts, thus driving a young researcher like me towards a maturity of thought, spirit and expression.

Additionally, the Exhibition on Easter 1916 at the GPO and the UCD, and the exhibition on World War I in the archival section of the NLI were particularly insightful and informative.

Talks and Symposia at the Long Room Hub:

Basing myself at the Trinity Long Room Hub also gave me the opportunity to attend talks, presentations and symposia on a wide range of subjects at the LRH. The Long Room Hub organized a conference on India and Ireland in June 2016, and the various papers presented in the Conference gave me a historical understanding of India-Ireland relations and profound insights into the cultural affinity of India and Ireland from myriad vantage points. The wide range of insights that I came across aided the politico-historical framework that I had adopted to analyze Yeats's work. Especially, the presentations of Paddy O'Leary, Jane Ohlmeyer, Jyoti Atwal, Bodh Prakash, Sucheta Mahajan, and Rita Banerjee are worth mentioning here. In the month of October, a one-day Symposium on "W.B. Yeats: Art Writing and Righting Art" was organized by The Department of English and The Long Room Hub. It was an illuminating and thought-provoking symposium where I got acquainted with the new researches going on in Yeats studies. The entire symposium was praiseworthy, but three papers which left an indelible mark on mind were "I Invite a Marmorean Muse: Yeats and Plastic Arts" by Jack Quin, "Packeting Poetry: Yeats, Pound and the Arts" by Adrian Paterson and "Against Interpretation: Yeats, Ekphrasis and the Problem of Mimesis" by Charles Armstrong.

Meeting Interviewing Yeats Scholars in Ireland:

My stay in Ireland also gave me the opportunity to meet numerous scholars on Yeats. Among the many scholars I met in Dublin was Professor Nicholas Grene, whose book *Yeats's Poetic Codes* I had already read. Our association grew from a formal meeting to Prof. Grene encouraging me to present my doctoral work at the Young Researchers' Seminar, to Prof. Grene consenting to

give me an interview on his experience of introducing and teaching Indian English Literature at TCD on his visit to India in January 2017. I will forever be indebted to him for the help, inspiration and encouragement he has extended to me. I also got the opportunity to meet Tom Walker, another Professor at the Department of English at TCD, who provided me significant information for my research and also gave me some useful tips to conduct my research within a limited timeframe. In the Long Room Hub, Prof. Munira Mutran from the University of São Paulo discussed my research at length and also gave me useful suggestions regarding the same. I also had the fortune of meeting the greatly revered Professor Terence Brown, whose biography on Yeats is beyond excellent and informative. This was the most memorable encounter during my stay, not only because he gave cogent answers to my queries related to archival research, but also left a deep impression on me because of his fondness for Yeats and his enthusiasm regarding my research! Something about him left an indelible mark on my psyche! Additionally, I could also interact with many scholars on Yeats at the International Yeats Summer School which I participated in, the details of which will follow in the following section.

Papers Presented and Summer School Attended:

I presented my research at the Post-Graduate Seminar organized by the Department of English, Trinity College, Dublin in October as well in the Hub before my departure in November. Let me also mention here that the concept of Coffee Mornings at the Long Room Hub, where everyone is given a chance to present their ongoing research is quite laudable. I think it is a platform which should be adopted by every academic institution. It is not only multidisciplinary in nature but a source of varied information that one gets by interacting with scholars and faculty members in a conducive and friendly environment.

Additionally, my stay perfectly coincided with the International Yeats Summer School organized by the Yeats Society in Sligo, Ireland, from July 24-August 5, 2016. This visit was the most enriching and fruitful part of my stay in Ireland, as I got the advantage of attending lectures, poetry readings, seminars, workshops (poetry and drama) and performances. I had the enviable fortune of listening to and interacting with renowned Yeats scholars like Jahan Ramazani, R. F. Foster, Aoife Monk, and Ben Levitas, to name a few. The icing on the cake, however, was the conducive scholarly environment I received for discussing my doctoral

research with exceptional experts on Yeats, meeting and exchanging ideas with other young Yeatsian scholars, and watching live back-to-back performances of Yeats's plays and poetry in various theatre houses in Sligo. I made some good friends during the Summer School who continue to be in touch with me, and we share with each other our enthusiasm and research on Yeats, our work in progress, and extend help to each other whenever possible. My visit to Sligo will be permanently etched in my memory because of the numerous walks along the Atlantic (especially at Rosses Point and Strandhill) which was home to the young Yeats, bringing back memories of the places associated with Yeats (like the old cottage of Yeats' grandfather where Yeats lived as a child), and soaking in the spirit of Yeats along the cliffs and the lush green banks of the Atlantic.