

Poetry and Psychoanalysis:

The Ethics of Desire in W. B. Yeats's Poetic Discourse

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Abstract: Man in the modern world becomes aware of strange areas of knowledge both within and around him and uncertain of his identity. For a source of order, he turns to the “mysterious” formal properties of language, which Foucault terms as “a profound historicity,” a “historical form coherent with the density of its own past.” This turn to “mysterious” forms for representing modern complexities stimulate the modern poets to seek for a strategic medium. The Freudian “Unconscious” is the most efficient medium for revealing and hiding the thick “density of its own past” of “profound historicity.” In this context, my objective in this essay is to construct a post-Freudian poetics of unconscious desire. Since both psychoanalysis and analysis of literary texts follow the logic coming from the unconscious, signifiers coming from the dream is crucial in constructing the interpretation of both the patient's discourse and the literary discourse of the speaking/writing subject. Lacan's poetics of the unconscious desire and the discourse of sublimation provides a theoretical model for analyzing Yeats's poetic discourse. On the one hand, Yeats's poetry demonstrates effectively the fundamental mechanisms of Freudian dream work. On the other hand, poet's unconscious desire comes from “elsewhere,” from the mysterious formal properties of language in relation to the Foucauldian historical form. Based upon these two rationales of dream rhetoric and historical narrative, Yeats's unconscious text of the poetic discourse will be dealt with in the context of the ethics of desire.

Key words: psychoanalysis and poetry; ethics of desire; sublimation and unconscious discourse; empty speech and full speech

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标题：诗歌与精神分析：叶芝诗性话语中的欲望伦理学

内容摘要：在现代世界中，人类意识到自己内部和周围陌生的知识领域以及不确定的身份。为了获得秩序，他转向了语言的“神秘”形式属性，福柯称之为“深刻的历史性”，“一种与它自身的过去的深度相一致的历史形式”。这一代表现代复杂性的“神秘”形式转向激励了现代诗人寻求策略性的媒介。弗洛伊德的“无意识”是揭示和隐藏“自己过去深度”的“深刻的历史性”的最有效媒介。在此背景下，本文旨在构建无意识欲望的后弗洛伊德诗学。由于精神分析和文学文本分析都遵循来自无意识的逻辑，因此，在建构关于口语/写作主体的患者话语和文学话语的解释时，来自于梦的能指至关重要。拉康关于无意识欲望和升华话语的诗学为分析叶芝的诗性话语提供了理论模型。一方面，叶芝的诗歌有效地展示了弗洛伊德梦工的基本机制；另一方面，诗人的无意识欲望来自“其他地方”，来自于和福柯历史形式相关的语言的“神秘”形式属性。基于梦修辞学和历史叙事这两个基本原理，本文将在欲望伦理学的语境中分析叶芝诗性话语的无意识文本。

关键词：精神分析与诗歌；欲望伦理学；升华和无意识的话语；虚言和实言

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Michel Foucault, in his “Preface” to *The Order of Things* (1970), articulates the paradigm shift in “the field of Western knowledge” in a succinct paragraph:

In this way [of archaeology], analysis has been able to show the coherence that existed, throughout the Classical age, between the theory of representation and the theories of language, of the natural orders, and of wealth and value. It is this configuration that, from the nineteenth century onward, changes entirely; the theory of representation disappears as the universal foundation of all possible orders; language as the spontaneous *tabula*, the primary grid of things, as an indispensable link between representation and things, is eclipsed in its turn; a profound historicity penetrates into the heart of things, isolates and defines them in their own coherence, imposes upon them the forms of order implied by the continuity of time; the analysis of exchange and money gives way to the study of production, that of the organism takes precedence over the search for taxonomic characteristics, and above all, language loses its privileged position and becomes, in its turn, a historical form coherent with

the density of its own past. (xxiii)

Foucault further sees that man in the modern world becomes uncertain of his identity and newly aware of strange areas of knowledge both within and around him. For a source of order, he turns to the “mysterious” formal properties of language, which Foucault defines in terms of “a profound historicity” or “a historical form coherent with the density of its own past” in the quoted passage. This turn to “mysterious” forms for representing modern complexities stimulate the modern poets to seek for a strategic medium through which he can justify his faith in his visionary perception of the world, inviting readers to participate an imaginative echo chamber of literary communion.

One way to understand the mysterious formal properties of language is provided by the Freudian “Unconscious” which reveals and hides thick “density of its own past” of “profound historicity.” It was Jacques Lacan who initiates his return to Freud from the convergent perspective of linguistics, structural anthropology, psychology, and topology, and articulates the psychoanalytic nature of the Unconscious with his famous mottos of “The Unconscious is structured like a language” and “Desire is interpretation.”

In the realm of the contemporary literary theory and criticism, psychoanalysis provides a unique lense for rereading literary texts, giving us the pleasure of reading latent texts or unconscious texts, which were left unknown and unread. Nevertheless, few critics or theorists have attempted to employ the psychoanalytic approach to modernist texts, in particular, poetic texts, and their analyses of modern poetry were incomplete, failing to establish a coherent discourse in dealing with complex and fragmentary aspects of the unconscious discourse of fragmentary modernist texts. My objective in this essay is to construct a post-Freudian poetics of desire in terms of Jacques Lacan’s fundamental concepts, focusing on the formal properties of language in analysis. Since both psychoanalysis and analysis of literary texts follow the logic coming from the unconscious, signifiers coming from the dream is crucial in constructing the interpretation of both the patient’s discourse and the literary discourse of the speaking/writing subject.

The Poetics of the Unconscious Desire and the Discourse of Sublimation in Psychoanalysis: Empty Speech and Full Speech

In his “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis” (197-268) of *Écrits*, Lacan defines the structural principle of the psychoanalytic

discourse in terms of “reply and silence.” In “I. Empty Speech and Full Speech in the Psychoanalytic Realization of the Subject,” while touching on the nature of psychoanalytic discourse, Lacan relates the psychanalytic realization of the subject to “healing, training, or sounding the depths.” He confirms the Freudian principle of psychoanalysis that the heart of the function of the speech lies in the fact that psychoanalysis has only one medium: “the patient’s speech,” and “no speech is without a response, even if speech meets only with silence, provided it has an auditor.” Lacan goes on elaborating this in the same page as follows:

But if the psychoanalyst is not aware that this is how speech functions, he will experience its call [appel] all the more strongly; and if emptiness is the first thing to make itself heard in analysis, he will feel it in himself and he will seek a reality beyond speech to fill the emptiness. This leads the analyst to analyze the subject’s behavior in order to find in it what the subject is not saying. (*Écrits* 206)

In fact, this “call” or appeal the subject was making beyond the emptiness of his words is “the appeal to truth” of the subject, reaching the “unsaid” (“what the subject is not saying”) truth in the unconscious by analyzing “the subject’s behavior.” During the psychoanalytic session, the analysand normally talks in free association, while the analyst silently listens. The function of speech in analysis becomes “empty” when the subject speaks in vain to the analyst who fails to reply or respond to what he desires. That is why in this process of “working through” (the German word “Drucharbeiten”), the subject reveals “frustration, aggressivity, and regression” (*Écrits* 207).

The frustration comes from the analyst’s silence in responding to the subject’s “empty speech” in which “the subject seems to speak in vain about someone who—will never join him in the assumption of his desire” (*Écrits* 211). In rhetorical questions, Lacan raises the fundamental issue of “where this frustration comes from”:

Is it from the analyst’s silence? Responding to the subject’s empty speech—even especially in an approving manner—often proves, by its effects, to be far more frustrating than silence. Isn’t it, rather, a frustration that is inherent in the subject’s very discourse? Doesn’t the subject become involved here in an ever greater dispossession of himself as a being, concerning which—by dint of sincere portraits which leave the idea of his being no less incoherent,

of rectifications that do not succeed in isolating its essence, of stays and defenses that do not prevent his statue from tottering, of narcissistic embraces that become like a puff of air in animating it—he ends up recognizing that this being has never been anything more than his own construction [oeuvre] in the imaginary and that this construction undercuts all certainty in him? For in the work he does to reconstruct it *for another*, he encounters anew the fundamental alienation that made him construct *like another*, and that has always destined it to be taken away from him *by another*. (*Écrits* 207).

In fact, Lacan has provided the list of the nature of internal frustration in the mind of the analysand who naturally reveals aggressiveness or resistance against the analyst to fill in the emptiness inside. What the analysand through the process of regression (bringing into the present in the subject's discourse) comes to recognize during his activity of free association is the illusory nature of his identity which results from "his own construction (oeuvre) in the imaginary" which "undercuts all certainty in him," or from "misrecognitions" (*méconnaissance*). As a result of this recognition or misrecognition, the analysand perceives that his own desired object belongs to the Imaginary Other or fantasy. Lacan remarks in relation to this perception:

This ego, whose strength our theorists now define by its capacity to bear frustration, is frustration in its essence. Not frustration of a desire of the subject, but frustration by an object in which his desire is alienated; and the more developed this object becomes, the more profoundly the subject becomes alienated from his *jouissance*. (*Écrits* 208)

Thus, as Lacan perceives, "the subject makes himself an object by displaying himself before the mirror" (*Écrits* 208), recalling the famous "mirror stage" of the "fragmented body." In free association, the subject's speech is filled with his alienating ego (*moi*) identity with the fragmented body before the mirror, thereby becoming "empty" of the subject. The analysand with symptom and "frustration by an object in which his desire is alienated" becomes alienated and fragmented in his objectification process. Lacan's obscure language, nevertheless, provides a succinct and clear context of this in terms of the "drama" of the mirror stage:

[T]he mirror stage is a drama whose internal pressure pushes precipitously from insufficiency to anticipation—and, for the subject caught up in the lure of

spatial identification, turns out fantasies that proceed from a fragmented image of the body to what I will call an “orthopedic” form of its totality—and to the finally donned armor of an alienating identity that will mark his entire mental development with its rigid structure. Thus, the shattering of the *Innenwelt* (the inner world of I) to *Umbelt* (the real world around the I) circle gives rise to an inexhaustible squaring of the ego's audits. (“The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function,” *Écrits* 78)

Having said this, Lacan's suggestion concerning the analyst's role is definitive:

The analyst's art must, on the contrary, involve suspending the subject's certainties until their final mirages have been consumed. And it is in the subject's discourse that their dissolution must be punctuated. Indeed, however empty his discourse may seem, it is so only if taken at face value—the value that justifies Mallarmé's remark, in which he compares the common use of language to the exchange of a coin whose obverse and reverse no longer bear but eroded faces, and which people pass from hand to hand “in silence.” This metaphor suffices to remind us that speech, even when almost completely worn out, retains its value as a *tassera*. Even if it communicates nothing, discourse represents the existence of communication; even if it denies the obvious, it affirms that speech constitutes truth; even if it is destined to deceive, it relies on faith in testimony. (*Écrits* 209)

In short, the analyst's role is to provide the interruption of the psychoanalytic dialogue so that empty speech of the analysand in free association can make sense when it is punctuated. This punctuation is called the “Lacanian cut,” helping the analysand reach a symbolic interpretation of his own associative discourse. Lacan's dictum, “Desire is interpretation,” can be understood in this context, and the analysand's desire to interpret himself is the aim for the psychoanalysis. Thus, the psychoanalytically realized subject can transform and overcome the empty speech and reach the full speech, by producing a coherent narrative which constitutes a subject and simultaneously reveals the truth of the subject.

Lacan, while referring to and following how Freud measures the validity of the cure in the case of the Wolf Man, claims that “the effect of full speech is to reorder past contingencies by conferring on them the sense of necessities to come, such as they are constituted by the scant freedom through which the subject

makes them present” (*Écrits* 213).¹ These “past contingencies,” as Lacan continues to demonstrate, construct the unconscious which is “the chapter of my history that is marked by a blank or occupied by a lie: it is a censored chapter,” and this chapter “has already been written *elsewhere*.” In literature, this chapter has been written either in the fictional/dramatic discourse or in the poetic discourse or in combination of any.

Psychoanalysis aims to re-find/refine the truth in “elsewhere” which Lacan himself identifies with: 1) “my body” as “monument” in which the hysterical symptom manifests the structure of language, and is deciphered like an inscription which, once recovered, can be destroyed without serious loss; 2) my “childhood memories” as “archival documents” which are impenetrable” “when I do not know their provenance”; 3) “the stock of words and acceptions of my own particular vocabulary” as “semantic evolution” which corresponds to “my style of life and my character”; 4) “the legends which, in a heroic-ized form, convey my history” as “traditions”; 5) last but not least, “the traces [of the unconscious] that are inevitably preserved in the distortions necessitated by the insertion of the adulterated chapter into the chapters surrounding it, and whose meaning will be re-established by my exegesis” (*Écrits* 215). In short, Lacan elaborates the nature of “the unconscious desire” in terms of “the censored chapter” of the analysand’s personal history to be “re-found” and “most often has already been written elsewhere.” When one attempts to interpret or give analysis of the truth of the psychoanalytic subject, the language of the unconscious desire (which is represented either by fictional/dramatic discourse or poetic discourse) is revealed in several features of the analysand’s symbolic behavior: bodily symptoms, childhood memories, particular vocabulary, legends and proto-narratives which provide the keys to the Lacanian “elsewhere.” This is the platform of psychoanalytic analysis which was introduced by Breuer and Freud and named “talking cure” by one of Breuer’s patients, Anna O, the platform which was further developed into the unconscious discourse of “sublimation” by Freud and Lacan.

1 Freud measures the completeness of the cure by the condition of continuity in the “anamnesis,” the condition which is a question of remembering the history of the subject and deciding the meaning to be attached to the early event belatedly. This anamnesis refers to the “reordering of the past contingencies” which belongs to “each turning point at which the subject restructures himself” (or “resubjectivizations of the event”) in remembering the history of the subject. In fact, this Freudian restructuring of the event takes place “after the fact” (*nachträglich*):

Freud declares that he considers it legitimate, in analyzing the processes, to elide the time intervals during which the event remains latent in the subject. That is to say, he annuls the *times for understanding* in favor of the moments of concluding which precipitate the subject’s meditation toward deciding the meaning to be attached to the early event. (*Écrits* 213)

Originally, Freud refers “sublimation” to the process by which the libido is transferred from a material object towards an object that does not have any connection with this physical need, thereby channeling or sublimating the libido into non-sexual activities such as artistic creation and intellectual work.¹ Lacan follows Freud and links sublimation with art and creation. In his “On Creation *ex nihilo*,” *Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan brings the object of the vase in a figurative sense:

It creates the void and thereby introduces the possibility of filling it. Emptiness and fullness are introduced into a world that by itself knows not of them. It is on the basis of this fabricated signifier, this vase, that emptiness and fullness as such enter the world, neither more or less, and with the same sense.

This is the moment to point to the fallacious opposition between what is called concrete and what is called figurative. If the vase may be filled, it is because in the first place in its essence it is empty. And it is exactly in the same sense that speech and discourse may be full or empty. (“On Creation *ex nihilo*” 120)

Then in the next page, Lacan continue to relate this issue of empty and full in terms of the object:

[A]s an object made to represent the existence of the emptiness at the center of the real that is called The Thing, this emptiness as represented in the representation presents itself as a *nihil*, as nothing. And that is why the potter, just like you to whom I am speaking, creates the vase with his hand around this emptiness, creates it, just like the mythical creator, *ex nihilo*, starting with a hole [. . .] the fashioning of the signifier and the introduction of a gap or a hole in the real is identical. (“On Creation *ex nihilo*” 121)

In fact, Lacan changes the position of the object in the structure of fantasy, relocating the object in the position of the Thing by shifting the libido from the void of the empty signifier of the Thing to some concrete, material object of the Thing, from the empty representation of the Thing to the full representation of the

¹ Dylan Evans, in his *Introductory Dictionary to Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, succinctly summarizes the function of Freudian “sublimation” “as a socially acceptable escape valve for excess sexual energy which would otherwise have to be discharged in socially unacceptable forms (perverse behavior) or in neurotic symptoms” (198). He defines Lacanian “sublime quality of an object” not as intrinsic to the object itself, but as “an effect of the object’s position in the symbolic structure of the Thing.”

dignity of the Thing, as we see the issue of the vase in relation to the empty and full speech in terms of the “fashioning of the signifier.” For Lacan, sublimation “raises an object—to the dignity of the Thing” (“The Object and the thing,” *Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* 112). An object, such as the mother, “raised to the dignity of the Thing,” thus becomes sublime. In this way, Lacan goes beyond the discourse of Freudian sublimation of artistic creation and presents the poetics of the unconscious desire by providing the discourse of “sublimation.”

The Imaginary: The Context or Genealogy of the Poem, “The Cap and Bells”

Lacan’s post-Freudian poetics of the unconscious desire provides a theoretical model for analyzing Yeats’s poetic discourse. On the one hand, Yeats’s poetry demonstrates effectively the fundamental mechanisms of Freudian dream work. Freud said, “A dream is a rebus” in his *The Interpretation of Dream*. Lacan comments on this and stresses on the primacy of the signifier over the signified, asking rhetorically “the signification manifest in its images falls away, having no other scope than that of conveying the signifier that is disguised in it?” (“The Situation of Psychoanalysis and the Training of Psychoanalysis in 1956,” *Écrits* 394). Lacan’s argument is that the subject, fostered by the alienation, is captured by the primacy of the signifier. Thus, language fails because of the gap between the signifier and the signified in the form of disguise. In fact, Lacan’s motto, “The unconscious is structured like a language” is based upon the Freudian theory of the dream work that involves the mechanisms of condensation and displacement, working between the manifest material and the latent dream thoughts. In the language processing of the unconscious, the metaphoric and metonymic mechanisms are synchronized with the functioning of the primary processes of condensation and displacement at the same time. In this context, symptom has a metaphoric structure of condensation and is represented by “the return of the repressed” in which the signifier of the signified is repressed by the consciousness of the subject, whereas desire has a metonymic structure of displacement and is represented by “a diachronic movement from one signifier to another along the signifying chain, as one signifier constantly refers to another in a perpetual deferral of meaning” (Evans 114). In relation to desire and symptom, Freudian syntactic displacement and semantic condensation constitutes the rhetoric of the dream. On the other hand, Yeats’s poetic discourse originates from the Lacanian “elsewhere” which can be relocated in the following loci of historical turning points of personal life-history re-presented in the symbolic language: bodily symptoms, childhood memories, particular vocabulary, legends and proto-narratives. Poet’s unintentional intentionality which is represented by his unconscious desire comes from “elsewhere,” from the

mysterious formal properties of language, recalling the list of the aforementioned Foucauldian “historical form coherent with the density of its own past.”

Seen from these two rationales of dream rhetoric and historical narrative, Yeats's poetic discourse will be different from what we used to read and interpret, since we are analyzing and interpreting in terms of Freudian “overdetermination” which is tied to the multiple meanings inherent in the analysand's free associations. Let us now delve into Yeats's unconscious text in terms of dream work and symptom which are structured like a language. First of all, let us start with Yeats's poetic text, “The Cap and Bells,” which was written in 1893. Yeats himself gave the following remarks concerning this poem in relation to “dream” in a footnote to the poem in a manner of Freudian restructuring of the event: “*nachträglich*” (after the fact):

I dreamed this story exactly as I have written it, and dreamed another long dream after it, trying to make out its meaning, and whether I was to write in prose or verse. The first dream was more a vision than a dream, for it was beautiful and coherent, and gave me the sense of illumination and exaltation that one gets from visions, while the second dream was confused and meaningless. The poem has always meant a great deal to me, though, as is the way with symbolic poems, it has not always meant quite the same thing. Blake would have said, “The authors are in eternity,” and I am quite sure they can only be questioned in dreams. (*Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* 455)

While trying to understand the meaning of his dream, the poet himself reveals his desire to interpret his own dream which is obscure in its meaning. According to Lacan, desire is interpretation. In fact, this “symbolic poem” manifests itself as the unconscious text (“what is unsaid”) which expresses the subject's desire.

The title “The Cap and Bells,” written in 1893, was published in *National Observer* in 1894 as “Cap and Bell,” and the original title was used in *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899). What is at stake in dealing with the manifest dream text in grappling with the latent dream thoughts, one needs to resort to memoirs, autobiographies, letters, legends, and proto-narratives of the writer. Yeats has been prolific and prophetic in producing the articulation of his moods, feelings, and emotions in his writings such as fictions, plays, poetry, memoirs, autobiographies, letters, fairy tales and legends. As we understand from the Lacanian “elsewhere,” we as the readers can “re-find” the nature of “the unconscious desire” in “the censored chapter” of the personal history. We can give analysis of and interpret the truth of the speaker/writer by

close listening or close reading of the language of the unconscious desire.

The “cap and bells” was mentioned in Yeats’s essay, “The Queen and the Fool,” written and published in *The Celtic Twilight* (1893) which is a collection of the Irish supernatural tales of country beliefs, folk tales, and legends, and was later expanded to *Mythologies* (1959). In a footnote to the poem, “The Cap and Bells,” Yeats quotes the following image of Aengus from *The Celtic Twilight*:

I knew a man who was trying to bring before his mind’s eye an image of Aengus, the old Irish god of love and poetry and ecstasy, who changed four of his kisses into birds, and suddenly the image of a man with a cap and bells rushed before his mind’s eye, and grew vivid and spoke and called itself ‘Aengus’s messenger.’
(*Yeats’s Poems* 516; *Mythologies* 115)

An image of Aengus is retrieved in poet’s eye, and that of the jester with “a cap and bell” in the poem can be located in the fragmentary heroic legends of “Aengus, the old Irish god of love and poetry and ecstasy, who changed four of his kisses into birds.”¹ Another image of “a white fool in a visionary garden” is retrieved in the same passage:

And I knew another man, a truly great seer, who saw a white fool in a visionary garden, where there was a tree with peacocks’ feathers instead of leaves, and flowers that opened to show little human faces when the white fool had touched them with his cockscomb, and he saw at another time a white fool sitting by a pool and smiling and watching images of beautiful women floating up from the pool. (*Mythologies* 115)

Yeats has already provided the context of this narration of Irish mythological legends, quoting the words of a witch-doctor: “that ‘in every household’ of Faery ‘there is a queen and a fool,’ and that if you are ‘touched’ by either you never recover, though you may from the touch of any other in Faery” (*Mythologies* 112). The motif of “touch” is what’s at stake in the story.

1 According to old Irish mythology, Aengus is the otherworld god of the Tuatha Dé Danann (the race of Danu). In the legend of Aisling Aengusa (Dream of Aengus), Aengus falls in love with a girl he has seen only in a dream, and being in love-sick, he eventually discovers that he can find her called Caer Ibormeith (yew berry) along with one hundred and fifty other girls in Tipperary during Samain (Irish-Scottish Gaelic seasonal festival). These girls will change into swans. When he arrives there, she sees all the swans including Caer, and he also changes into a swan and flies with her back to Bruig na Bábainne where he was born and there they act as protectors to lovers (Smyth 15-16).

These images were sublimated “*näcsträglich*” (after the fact) to a poetic tale of magic fantasy in another poem, “The Song of Wandering Aengus,” written in 1897:

I went out to hazel wood,
Because a fire was in my head,
And cut and peeled a hazel wand,
And when white moths were on the wing,
And moth-like stars were flickering out,
I dropped the berry in a stream
And caught a little silver trout.

When I had laid it on the floor
I went to blow the fire aflame,
But something rustled on the floor,
And some one called me by my name:
It had become a glimmering girl
With apple blossom in her hair
Who called me by my name and ran
And faded through the brightening air.

Though I am old with wandering
Through hollow lands and hilly lands,
I will find out where she has gone,
And kiss her lips and take her hands;
And walk among long dappled grass,
And pluck till time and times are done
The silver apples of the moon.
The golden apples of the sun. (*Yeats's Poems* 93-94)

Touching the idea of the Irish mythology of legendary metamorphosis in which the tribes of the goddess Danu (The Thustha de Danaan) can take all shapes, (those in the waters often taking the shape of fish), the poet presents a condensed silvery poetic spark of “a little silver trout,” displacing the swan of the legendary Aengus into a fish in a metonymic way. Desire is metonymy. Therefore, the poet's Freudian dream rhetoric of syntactic condensation and sematic displacement is evident here, revealing the poet's unconscious desire of longing for the beloved, demonstrating a typical symptom of obsessional neurosis.

In the poem, “The Cap and Bells,” however, the image of Aengus of the Irish mythology who transformed himself into a swan has been displaced into the image of “a jester.” This image of the jester has been reversed from that of “a white fool in a visionary garden” in the mythological tales. Instead of giving the touch and a stroke which we can never recover, the jester himself was fatally given “the touch” and became a love-sick soul. In the poem, the first image of the tale is contiguously displaced and condensed into a poetic spark of the image of the jester with “cap and bells” who is in a symptomatic state of love-sickness for the queen who has been transformed from “a silver trout” into “a glimmering girl/ With apple blossom in her hair” in the poem, “The Wandering of Aengus.” In fact, the poet/speaker wears a mask of Aengus, falling into a fantasy, and reveals his unconscious desire to win the heart of the lady in question, the queen in the poem, “The Cap and Bells.”

The Symbolic: Interpretation of the Poem, “The Cap and Bells”

In the first three stanzas, the first proposal was initiated:

The jester walked in the garden:
The garden had fallen still;
He bade his soul rise upward
And stand on her window-sill.

It rose in a straight blue garment,
When owls began to call;
It had grown wise-tongued by thinking
Of a quiet and light footfall;

But the young queen would not listen:
She rose in her pale night-gown;
She drew in the heavy casement
And pushed the latches down.

The image of “A jester walked in the garden” provides the readers with both the *Innenwelt* (the inner world of I) and *Umbelt* (the real world around the I) of the speaking subject. The jester is being obsessed with the object desired which is the queen and walking in the garden which had fallen still. In this poem, the speaking subject expresses his unconscious desire, while revealing his behaviors projecting his persistent love proposal. A jester in relation to “his soul” re-presents the *Innenwelt* in

the speaking subject's Imaginary order, and the garden represents Umwelt in his Real Order. But this image falls to a standstill, and becomes a symbol, thus entering the Symbolic Order. The language of the soul reaches the wisdom by imagining "a quiet and light footfall." When the owl, the metaphor of wisdom, began to call, the soul "rose in a straight blue garment" up to the pure soul. The jester wears the mask of desire which deeply demands the recognition from the queen. This mask of desire is colored by the straight blue garment. Despite this eager passionate proposal of the jester, the queen's reply is meager silence, and she punctuates jester's action with her symbolic acts of "drawing in the heavy casement/ And pushed the latches down," expressing her negation not to accept the jester's proposal. The jester in frustration fails to translate the meaning of this. In fact, the jester never raises a question, "what does she want?" or "what does a woman want?"

When his song of the soul does not get response from the queen, the jester attempts a second try with his heart:

He bade his heart go to her,
When the owls called out no more;
In a red and quivering garment
It sang to her through the door.

It had grown sweet-tongued by dreaming
Of a flutter of flower-like hair;
But she took up her fan from the table
And waved it off on the air.

The jester lets his heart sing to the queen through the closed door in "a red and quivering garment," of a passionate and agonizing tune. The song is that of heart's desire, although desire becomes alienated from the biological need. The jester's heart possesses the passion/Passion which "had grown sweet-tongued," "by dreaming/ Of a flutter of flower-like hair." The jester translates the metonymic images of the queen in the Imaginary Order into the sweet language of the dream in the Symbolic Order. However, the queen simply "took up her fan from the table / And waved it off on the air."

Final scene/session is a drama of frustration and aggressivity of the mirror stage. The jester becomes frustrated internally and reveals aggressivity externally against the queen to make up for what he felt inside. The jester contrives a desperate solution by sending the queen all he has, that is, "cap and bells":

‘I have cap and bells,’ he pondered.
 ‘I will send them to her and die’:
 And when the morning whitened
 He left them where she went by.

After all, he blurts out the saying that he will send them to her as the ultimatum and die, by changing his position from the jester in the Imaginary Order into the speaking subject in the Symbolic Order, finally. When the morning becomes white as if it were the omen for death, the jester left “the cap and bells” (IT /Ça) where she went by. Then, the final scene of consummation is performed:

She laid them upon her bosom
 Under a cloud of her hair,
 And her red lips sang them a love-song
 Till stars grew out of the air.

She opened her door and her window,
 And the heart and the soul came through,
 To her right hand came the red one,
 To her left hand came the blue.

They set up a noise like crickets,
 A chattering wise and sweet,
 And her hair was a folded flower
 And the quiet of love in her feet. (*Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* 65-66)

The queen embraces “the cap and bells” (“It” or “Ça”) of the jester “upon her bosom/ Under a cloud of her hair.” She opens wide every nook and cranny of her house with “her door and her window” through which “the red heart and the blue soul” of the jester came, while singing a love-song with her sensual red lips until the evening. Love fulfilled.

As we have seen in the symbolic language of Yeats’s poetic representation in the poem, the three scenes/sessions are dramatically constituted of the psychoanalytic discourse and situations between the jester and the queen. The interpretation of the poem produce a coherent narrative which constitutes a subject and simultaneously reveals the truth of the jester’s desire. Now, the poem has become a “beautiful and coherent” narrative, as we recall the first dream in a footnote to the poem, “The Cap

and Bells.” This poem provides “more a vision than a dream,” giving “the sense of illumination and exaltation that one gets from visions.”

What, then, about the second dream which was “confused and meaningless” (*Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* 455). One needs to turn to the Real, the location of life and love of the real people.

The Real: Love

Who are the jester and the queen, then? Yeats's own autobiography and the biographical information about Yeats¹ present vividly Yeats's “high way of love,” and the history of the proposals structurates the unconscious text of poet's proto-narratives. Yeats met for the first time in Bedford Park in 1889, fell in love with her immediately. In 1891, he proposes her in vain, and Maud Gonne went to Paris. In 1894, he again proposes her without success. In 1898, however, Yeats and Maud Gonne experienced the spiritual union at the Nassau where “for the first time with the bodily mouth,” Maud kissed Yeats (*Memoirs* 132). The failure, nevertheless, went on. In 1899 and 1900, Yeats proposes and suffers from rejections again in Paris and London. These are the historical turning-points of the speaking subject's proposals during the decade between 1889 and 1900.

What happened in the Real world between Yeats and Maud Gonne? In his “Autobiography,” Yeats refers to his first impression about Maud Gonne who visits his father, John Butler Yeats at Bedford Park in January 30, 1889, four years before this poem was written. Yeats records his first meeting vividly, starting with the statement: “I was twenty-three years old when the troubling of my life began” (*Memoirs* 40):

In after years I persuaded myself that I felt premonitory excitement at the first reading of her name. Presently she drove up to my house in Bedford Park with an introduction from John O'Leary to my father. I had never thought to see in a living woman so great beauty. It belonged to famous pictures, to poetry, to some legendary past. A complexion like the blossom of apples, and yet face and body had the beauty of lineaments which Blake calls the highest beauty because it changes least from youth to age, and a stature so great that she seemed of a divine race. Her movements were worthy of her form, and I understand at last why the poet of antiquity, where we would but speak of face and form, sings, loving some lady, that she paces like a goddess. (“Autobiography,” *Memoirs* 40)

¹ See Yeats's *The Autobiography of William Butler Yeats* (1965), *Memoirs: Autobiography-First Draft Journal* (1972), and Terence Brown's *The Life of W. B. Yeats* (1999) for further reference.

First impressions of Maud Gonne as “the highest beauty” “of a divine race” with “a complexion like the blossom of apples,” “pacing like a goddess,” are sensational. The impression of goddess-like Maud Gonne is strongly imprinted in the memory reservoir of Yeats the poet.

Nevertheless, Yeats with “a clairvoyant perception” predicts his future of miserable frustration and desire:

I felt in the presence of a great generosity and courage, and of a mind without peace, and when she and all her singing birds had gone my melancholy was not the mere melancholy of love. I had what I thought was a ‘clairvoyant’ perception ..., I can see now, but an obvious deduction of an awaiting immediate disaster ... I was in love but had not spoken of love and never meant to speak, and as the months passed I grew master of myself again. ‘What wife would she make,’ I thought, ‘what share could she have in the life of a student?’ (“Autobiography,” *Memoir* 42-3)

Yeats recalls the event of his first proposal in July 1891, when Yeats and Maud Gonne met at a little hotel in Nassau Street, Dublin:

At the first sight of her as she came through the door, her great height seeming to fill it, I was overwhelmed with emotion, an intoxication of pity. She did not seem to have any beauty, her face was wasted, the form of the bones showing, and there was no life in her manner. As our talk became intimate, she hinted at some unhappiness, some disillusionment. The old hard resonance had gone and she had become gentle and indolent. I was in love once more and no longer wished to fight against it. I no longer thought what kind of wife would this woman make, but of her need for protection and for peace. (“Autobiography,” *Memoir* 45)

In the next page of the “Autobiography,” the story goes after this: Then he left Dublin “next day” and spent “a week or ten days,” and presently came from Maud a letter “touching a little upon her sadness, and telling of a dream of some past life,” a letter stating that she and Yeats had been “brother and sister somewhere on the edge of the Arabian desert, and sold together into slavery,” and that she had “an impression of some long journey and of miles upon miles of the desert sand.” Yeats received this heart-rending letter from Maud, and “returned to Dublin at once.” And “that evening but a few minutes after [they] had met,” Yeats asked her to marry him. Yeats is touching on the Real, the Real which is the very thing impossible to say, the impossible

story of the “cri du coeur” (the cry of the heart):

I remember a curious thing. I had come into the room with that purpose in my mind, and hardly looked at her or thought of her beauty. I sat there holding her hand and speaking vehemently. She did not take away her hand for a while. I ceased to speak, and presently as I sat in silence I felt her nearness to me and her beauty. At once I knew that my confidence had gone, and an instant later she drew her hand away. No, she could not marry--there were reasons--she would never marry; but in words that had no conventional ring she asked for my friendship. (“Autobiography,” *Memoir* 46)

What can Yeats say to Maud at this point? Nancy Cardozo, a biographer of Maud Gonne, reports on this event from Maud Gonne's perspective:

A few moments after he arrived at the Nassau Hotel he asked her to marry him. He hardly looked at her but sat “holding her hand and speaking vehemently.” The request, which he considered unconventional, was not meant to be cruel or capricious. Maud depended on him for understanding and sympathy, the closeness she had once known with Tommy. Yeats was exceptionally intuitive about women's feelings, and she felt as easy with him as if he had been a brother. Still, she did not dare tell him about her life in Paris, her troubles with Millevoye, her delight in her little son. Willie could not be trusted to keep a secret, and fear of grave damage to her reputation, as well as her need for his friendship, kept her from telling him the truth. She told him only that she would never marry, and she was relieved that he did not press her to become his mistress. (Cardozo 98)

There is no way for Yeats to know this secret heart of Maud Gonne.

It was in 1898 belatedly that Yeats came to know the revelation of Maud Gonne's secret heart ironically at the moment of the so-called “spiritual marriage,” as if life is a “confused” and incoherent dream. Yeats recalls this event of December 6, 1898:

I woke up in my hotel somewhere near Rutland Square with the fading vision of her face bending over mine and the knowledge that she had just kissed me. I joined her after breakfast in the Nassau Hotel. We were to spend the day together and visit in the afternoon the old Fenian leader, James Stephen. She said, “Had you a strange dream last night?” I said, “I dreamed this morning for the first time in my life that you kissed me.” She made no answer, but last night when

dinner was over and I was about to return home she said, "I will tell you now what happened. When I fell asleep last night I saw standing at my bedside a great spirit. He took me to a great throng of spirits and you were among them. My hand was put into yours and I was told that we were married. After that I remember nothing." Then and there for the first time with the bodily mouth, she kissed me. ("Autobiography," *Memoir* 131-132)

So far, the life is a magic and romantic.

However, a dramatic change has happened suddenly within a day, reminding us of the Real in which life is unpredictable and confusing.

The next day [December 7, 1898] I found her sitting very gloomily over the fire. "I should not have spoken to you in that day," she said, "for I can never be your wife in reality." I said, "Do you love anyone else?" and she said "No" but added that there was somebody else, and that she had to be a moral nature for two. Then bit by bit came out the story of her life, things I had heard all twisted awry by scandal, and disbelieve. ("Autobiography," *Memoir* 132)

One needs a true story of Maud's deceiving heart. Yeats's version in "Autobiography" is fragmentary, confused, and incoherent. Let us hear Terence Brown's coherent version, a little detached from the Real life of both:

The next she confessed all the facts of her life, some of which Yeats had heard about through innuendo and dismissed as impossible. He heard of how as a girl she had made a pact with the devil if he would give her "control over her own life." Within a fortnight her father had died. He heard moreover how she had been Millevoye's mistress and had borne him two children. He must have been especially shocked when she told him how Millevoye and she had made love in the vault under the memorial chapel where her first born [Georgette] was buried, in the hope that his soul might be reincarnated in another child. He heard about the now four-year-old child of that encounter, the daughter she had named Iseult. ("Autobiography," *Memoir* 102)

Another complication occurs to make the story more confusing. On December 17, 1898, ten days after Maud Gonnet's confession, Yeats recalls the real event of "spiritual marriage" when they were sitting together talking about Maud's vision of her Initiation of the Spear:

We became silent; a double vision unfolded itself, neither speaking till all was finished. She thought herself a great stone statue through which passed flame, and I felt myself becoming flame and mounting up through and looking out of the eyes of a great stone Minerva. Were the beings which stand behind human life trying to unite us, or had we brought it by our own dreams? She was now always very emotional, and would kiss me very tenderly, but when I spoke of marriage on the eve of her leaving said, "No, it seems to be impossible." And then, with clenched hands, "I have a horror of physical love." Lady Gregory was in Venice, but had come home at once on receiving from me an incoherent letter. She offered me money to travel, and told me not to leave Maud Gonne till I had her promise of marriage, but I said, "No, I am too exhausted; I can do no more." ("Autobiography," *Memoir* 134)

Refusing to accept Yeats's proposal again in the middle of their so-called "spiritual marriage," Maud mentions "a horror of physical love," leaving Yeats confusing, incoherent and exhausted. If the life is a daydream, then the dream is "confused and incoherent" as in the love story of Yeats and Maud Gonne tells us. These events in 1898 December are moments of revelation about the truth of political Maud Gonne's inscrutable heart for spiritual Yeats. In fact, the second dream which Yeats mentioned in the footnote to the Poem, "The Cap and Bells," seems to refer to the real life of Yeats, although the dream was not yet dreamed but imagined *a priori* and looking ahead, providing this prediction of the future of his star-crossed love with Maud Gonne.

In this context, this dream text written in 1893 marks what Lacan calls "future anterior"--will have been--anticipating the future and regressing into the past, and back to the future, thereby revealing the truth of the speaking subject in the form of the persistent unconscious desire. This poem exposes the symptom of neurotic obsession and provides the symbolic behaviors of the identification and alienation in the imaginary I, anticipating always already the abysmal destiny.

Conclusion

Traces of love between Yeats and Maud Gonne are everywhere or elsewhere in Yeats's past memories, autobiographical proto-narrative and fragmentary heroic legends which

project the here and now of the poem, “The Cap and Bells.”¹ I have demonstrated the images of Aengus and the jester with cap and bells in the Imaginary Order of fantasy, the images retrieved from the archive of the heroic legends of the Irish mythology. This Imaginary Order which is embedded in the memory of the body transformed in the magic has contextualized the symbolic representation of the poetic discourse of poetry. The speaking subject as the symbolic I (je) in the Symbolic Order of the poetic discourse reveals the unconscious desire of the subject in the symbolic narrative, telling the truth in a coherent narrative from the reader’s perspective. The writing subject’s lover story/life-history in the Real Order enables the readers to recognize the unconscious desire of the speaking subject, since this story/history is structured of historical turning points of personal life-history and re-presented in the symbolic language. In short, the Imaginary me (moi) reveals the imaginary identifications in the fictional narrative, the Symbolic I (je) reveals and tells the truth of the subject in the symbolic discourse of the poem, and the Real I reaches the truth of the Real and then disappears at the moment of truth. Attentive readers grasp trans-genre epiphanic revelations of the unconscious desire which appears in the symptom as the truth of the writing subject.

Yeats’s autobiography presents the ups and downs of his-story, his “highway of love” in terms of rejection, and this history of the proposals rejected structurates the unconscious text of poet’s proto-narratives. As we have traced, during the period of 1899 and 1900, Yeats suffers from rejections again and again in Paris and London, with an exception in the case of 1898 the so-called “spiritual marriage.” In 1903, Maud marries Major John MacBride finally. In 1916, when her husband was dead, Yeats proposes Maud in Normandy and she turned it down. In 1917, he proposes both Maud and Iseult Gonne, but was rejected from both. In October 21, 1917, he married not Maud Gonne, but Georgie Hyde-Lees who is 27 years younger than Yeats. These are the historical turning-points of the speaking subject’s emotional life. In the midst of these persistent proposals, what is at stake is the question of “what does a woman want?” To displace this woman question into the questions of “what does the queen want?” “what does the cap and bells mean?” “what are they to the queen?” and “why does the queen embrace the cap and bells?” will provoke further complication beyond the poetics of unconscious desire which I have been grappled with in this article.

1 See Yeats’s *The Autobiography of William Butler Yeats* (1965), *Memoirs: Autobiography-First Draft Journal* (1972), *Mythologies* (1959), and Nancy Cardozo’s *Maud Gonne: Lucky Eyes and a High Heart* (1978), and Margery Brady’s *The Love Story of Yeats and Maud Gonne* (1990) for further reference to the relationship between Yeats and Maud Gonne.

According to Lacan, “sublimation” raises an object to the dignity of the Thing, changing from the empty signifier of the Thing to the concrete, material object of the Thing. The metaphor of “the cap and bells” is the thing which has been raised from the empty signifier of the miserable “abject” thing to the “concrete, material” object of The Thing (It/Ca). Behind the scene, the queen’s hidden thinking has a great potential for the future interpretive venture.

I will conclude with the question of “what does the queen want?” My contention is that the queen functions as the agency in the Real Order, and punctuates with her silence. The queen chooses punctuation or breaks carefully, cuts off the speech of the jester, and helps the jester to reach a symbolic interpretation of his own associative discourse by grasping the gap between the imaginary moi and the symbolic je (the I), and to reach the true meaning of his own statement. In other words, the queen punctuates the indeterminate metonymical signifying chain of the jester’s proposal with her symbolic actions of the Lacanian cut. Thus, the jester becomes a psychoanalytically realized subject who can transform the empty speech into the full speech, thereby transmitting the truth of his desire and love to the queen successfully. This belongs to the ethics of desire. The aim of psychoanalysis, as in the analysis of poetic discourse, is to let the speaking/writing subject analyze and interpret his/her own empty speech by means of the interruption so that he/she could transform and overcome the empty speech and reach the full speech, by producing a coherent narrative which constitutes a subject and simultaneously reveals the truth of the subject. In this way, the discourse of “sublimation” will present the ethics of desire. I will argue that further study of Maud Gonne’s representation of her silence and reply will be rewarding on the question of the ethics of desire and the discourse of sublimation.

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