



Tikrit University

College of Education for Women

Fourth Year/ Modern poetry

Subject: "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death" by W.B.Yeats

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“An Irish Airman Foresees His Death”

The poem serves as a memorial to Robert Gregory, an Irish airman and the one of Yeats's close friends who was killed in WWI at the age of 36. After losing his dear friend in World War I, William Butler Yeats wrote this particular poem, **‘An Irish Airman Foresees His Death. Robert Gregory, an Irish Airman.** The death of Robert Gregory had a profound effect on W. B. Yeats' life, and he wrote **‘An Irish Airman Foresees His Death,’** along with **‘In Memory of Major Robert Gregory’**. Yeats was nearly fifty when World War I began. He was close with Gregory and his mother. His death drove him to write of his feelings and attitude the war. The speaker argues that the outcome of the war is ultimately meaningless for his small community in western Ireland, and that he feels no hatred towards his enemies nor love for the British. The poet reflects his own experience with the occupation, and with loss of his friends, that is why the tone is sad and elegiac.

Critical view

The speaker of the poem is a soldier who has come to terms with his own mortality, and is reflecting on the choices that led him to this moment. This poem is critical of both the war in general and specifically of British rule over Ireland. An Irish pilot fighting for Britain in the First World War predicts that he will die in that war, but he feels no sense of patriotic duty towards Britain, the country he fights for. The speaker describes his relationship with his country and his fellow citizens. Rather than feeling a strong sense of patriotism or nationalistic fervor, the speaker describes a more nuanced and complex relationship with his homeland. He acknowledges the poverty and hardship that his fellow citizens face, but does not necessarily feel a deep connection or love for them. Britain oppressed the Irish, took away their rights, prevented them from exercising their legal rights, and instead treated them as if it owned them. Yeats tries to show how they struggled with their identity as Irishmen risking their lives for a country they did not feel was their own. Therefore, he does not hate the people he is fighting against.

Analysis:-

**I know that I shall meet my fate
Somewhere among the clouds above;
Those that I fight I do not hate,
Those that I guard I do not love;**

In the opening lines of this poem, the speaker introduces the idea of death and that he will die “among the clouds above.” This phrase introduces the idea of “air” which represent for life and breath. But in this instance the clouds, which are composed of air, suggest death as well as the idea of heaven. So, from the beginning we have contrast between death and life. Yeats shows the airman’s ambiguous feelings about fighting in the war; he has no strong emotions concerning either those he is fighting against or those he is fighting to protect (chaos). But he is sure that he will die in this adventure. Death is his only reality. Through all the poem, the poet uses personal pronounces (I, MY), in order to reflect his own experience, and express his own thought and feeling. That is why it is the reflective poem.

**My country is Kiltartan Cross,
My countrymen Kiltartan’s poor,
No likely end could bring them loss
Or leave them happier than before.**

Here, he talks about his own village and his place of birth and the reader notices that there is a sense of pride in the tone of the speaker. He is pride of his country (Ireland), also of his religion (Catholicism). He realized the poor would not benefit, whether the war was lost or won. Here he realizes the fruitlessness of his participation in the war and at the same time he also foresees the futility of war. The life of his people remain unaffected by the result of the war. So, we have the idea of the aimlessness or futility of war and occupation beside the sense of pride in this stanza.

**Nor law, nor duty bade me fight,
Nor public men, nor cheering crowds,
A lonely impulse of delight
Drove to this tumult in the clouds;
I balanced all, brought all to mind,
The years to come seemed waste of breath,
A waste of breath the years behind
In balance with this life, this death.**

The speaker talks about the reasons that pushed him to fight. He said it is not a matter of law or duty, and not public men (like educated men, or religious men) or cheering crowds (the public people who encourage the queen). Nothing of this happened in his country. So, there is no logic reason that pushed him to this war. The only reason is "a lonely impulse of delight." This is the first irrational note to the speaker. The word "tumult" is used means disorder and a sense of occupation. The only result of the aimless war is the distraction. Also the poet talks about the future of Ireland if it still under the role of England. If they still under the occupation, they waste their life in vain.

Themes

Patriotism

It is clear that the pilot, serving in Britain's Royal Air Force, does not feel patriotism in the traditional sense of the word: he neither loves the ones he protects nor hates those he fights. He does feel a sense of identity, but it is with the people of Ireland, specifically those of Kiltartan.

Fate

The power of this poem lies in its first line: the speaker is not trying to beat his fate, nor is he trying to make things work out to his advantage. He is so certain that he will die that he uses the term "meet my fate" to mean the same thing as "die," accepting the fact that he has no other possible fate except dying.

