

**Abstract**

William Butler Yeats (1865–1939) is generally regarded as one of the greatest poets of the 20th century in English and Irish literatures. Though Yeats is known as a world renowned poet he also wrote some plays as well. His poetry is full of symbols depicting common and ordinary life and familiar traditions of Irish culture. His plays deal with mysticism, esoteric and non-realistic dramatic styles as well. This paper examines mysticism and mystical elements used in The Land of Heart's Desire as in line with Irish legends and mythology. It also deals with Yeats' love of his Irish homeland and the various myths and legends concerning fairies and a kind of fairy land in which humans are tempted to enter. To Yeats, fairies and the supernatural legends are used as tools to travel from the real world to the otherworld. The clashes of real and fancy worlds have been displayed with reference to the Irish myths. Mysticism has been one of the most thrilling and fascinating phenomena for the authors and humankind throughout ages. Mysticism refers to psychology, spiritualism, magic, and poetry as well as religion. Although it has no direct links with the divine religions it could be defined as human's experience of God.

**Key words:** Mysticism, fairyland, faith, otherworld, Yeats.

**Özet**

William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) 20.yy. İngiliz ve İrlanda edebiyatının en büyük şairlerinden biri olarak Kabul edilmektedir. Yeats, dünya çapında büyük bir şair olarak bilinmesine rağmen oyunlar da yazmıştır. Yeats'in şiiri, İrlanda kültürünü ve gelenekleri ile iç içe geçmiş gündelik ve sıradan hayata dair sembolleri yansıtmaktadır. Yeats'in oyunları, mistisizm, ezoterik ve gerçekçi olmayan dramatik tarzları ele almaktadır. Bu çalışma The Land of Heart's Desire daki mistisizm ve mistik unsurları İrlanda efsaneleri ve mitolojisine göre ele almaktadır. Çalışma, aynı zamanda Yeats'in ülkesine duyduğu vatan sevgisini ve insanları perili dünyalara çağırın birçok mit ve efsaneleri incelemektedir. Yeats Perileri ve doğaüstü efsaneleri gerçek dünyadan diğer dünyaya seyahat etmek için araçlar olarak kullanır. Gerçek ve perili dünyaların çatışmaları İrlanda mitleri referans alınarak gösterilmiştir. Mistisizm tarih boyunca yazarlar ve insanlık için en büyüleyici ve etkileyici olgu olmuştur. Mistisizm, psikoloji, spiritüalizm, sihir, şiir ve din anlamına da gelmektedir. Mistisizm her ne kadar kutsal dinlerle direkt bağlantısı olmasa da insanlığın Tanrı tecrübesi olarak tanımlanabilir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Mistisizm, masallar ülkesi, inanç, öbür dünya, Yeats.

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## Introduction

Mysticism has been one of the most thrilling and fascinating phenomena for the authors and humankind throughout ages. The Oxford English Dictionary defines it as “a belief in the possibility of union with or absorption into God by means of contemplation and self-surrender; belief in or devotion to the spiritual apprehension of truths inaccessible to the intellect” (842). Although it has no direct links with the divine religions “it could be defined as human’s experience of God, and there are mystical dimensions within all religions of the ancient world, essentially founded to explore the relationship between the soul and the Divine” (Dhar 2002: 4).

The term “mysticism”, historically, is associated with the Greek word “mysticus” which is connected to the rituals of the ancient Greek. As Dhar (2002) states that the term came into use in Christianity in sixth century. In the nineteenth century the term was used out of its religious context (Butler 2003: 4). Wallraven puts it as: by the 1890s the term mysticism and the mystical revival were in general used to refer to one of remarked trends of the decade: the wide spread emergence of a new esoteric spirituality and proliferation of spiritual groups and identities that together constituted what contemporaries called “the new spiritual movement of the age.” Mysticism is thus used to refer to esotericism, which, again, is then loosely described as spiritual movement (2015: 21).

It is challenging to define “mysticism” comprehensively as it has lots affinities. Schafer states:

Any attempt to define mysticism in any way that allows the definition to generally accepted is hopeless. There is no such thing as a universally recognized definition of mysticism, just as there is no such thing as universally recognized phenomenon of mysticism or notion of mystical experience. In fact, there are almost as many definitions of the terms as there are authors- if the authors even bother to define the object of their study at all. Mystical experience defers from culture to culture (2011: 1).

It, somewhat, refers to psychology, spiritualism, magic, and poetry as well as religion (Underhill 2004: 7). Mysticism has been present in almost all world literatures. The Irish literature is full of mystical elements as well.

Otherworld is a commonly used element and motif in Irish literature. It is sometimes given as the Elysian Fields, implicating the land of the dead. It is regarded as the realm of ancient gods- the Thuata Dé Danann, or “Tribes of the goddess Danu” (MacCana 1970: 124).

It may refer to the physical world and spiritual and imaginary world as well. The Otherworld also means a realm of eternal happiness, peace and abundance where death or old age do not prevail. (Pokorna 2012: 432). It is seen as a part of Ireland by Yeats as Ireland itself is an island.

William Butler Yeats (1865–1939) is generally regarded as one of the greatest poets of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in English and Irish literatures. Just like his contemporary Bernard Shaw (Çakırtaş & Şekerci 2015: 343), he was born into a Protestant family. He was born in Dublin and educated at the Godolphin School. He studied at the School of Art in Dublin where he had an interest in mystic religion and the supernatural (Drabble 2000: 1124). Though Yeats is known as a world renowned poet he also wrote some plays as well. His

poetry is full of symbols depicting common and ordinary life and familiar traditions of Irish culture. His plays deal with mysticism, esoteric and non-realistic dramatic styles as well; in these respects, he confronts his contemporary Bernard Shaw as Shaw challenges idealist dramatic works (Çakırtaş 2016: 10). Yeats often uses the Sidhe and the fairies in his works to give mystical impressions. For Yeats, fairies and the supernatural legends are used as tools to travel from the real world to the otherworld (Pokorna 2012: 73).

“Yeats leaned on mythology, ancient legends and folklore, in order to avail of them in his poetry as a vehicle to lead the nation towards a metaphorical transcendence” (Ibid., 5). Jeffares (1977) describes his interest in fairies and the supernatural as a part of his interest in mysticism “there is enough mysticism for him in the old legend and the myths of the Gael, profoundly symbolical as much as these are, and as practically all the earliest portion is” (101). The legendary Ireland was the major source for his plays and his nationalism. (Ibid., 102). The themes of hope, dreams, and the tales of Irish mythology are the key concepts of Yeats’ works. (Ross 2009: 352).

Emerging from his early enthusiasms Yeats declined to submit himself to the discipline of the theatre of his day. He was indeed fascinated by the idea of drama but it strikes me that he was not enamoured of the actual theatre. This may have led to his proposing to set up a non-popular coterie theatre where the poet would drive from the temple such mongers of naturalism etc. as Ibsen and Shaw, a theatre that would be "remote, spiritual and ideal (O'Connor 1965: 374).

Yeats wrote his first play *Mosada* in 1884, but it was never staged, because he did not write all the plays for the theatre, but for reading a loud and for hearing; His first play was staged is *The Countess Cathleen* (Sarker 2002: 310).

He wrote about 26 plays, all of which published by Macmillan in 1934. Only a few of his plays were fairly successful as theatre pieces, because he, was not a dramatist in the same full sense as Shaw, O'Casey or even Wilde (Sarker 2002: 310). But recently many critics argue that Yeats’s plays were not properly evaluated by his contemporary critics and that his works should be re-evaluated once again (Ibid., 310).

#### ***The Land of Heart’s Desire (1894)***

The play is based on a legend on May Eve. Sligo is the setting. It is a small and rural town in Ireland in old times. It deals with a peasant family and the fairy child. Shawn and Marie are a newly-wed couple. They live in an old cottage with a big family. The fairy child comes into the house and at the beginning she is welcomed warmly by the Father Hart’s household (Ross 2009: 352). The girl looks rather suspicious as she seems to be standing against Christianity. She denounces God. The priest takes down the Crucifix from the wall because it is scary for the child. The fairy child aims to tempt Mary to come with her to a fairy world where there is no death and suffering and no human responsibility. The girl offers Mary to get rid of this dull and boring world and life and join her in the world of fairies. (Ibid., 353). At the beginning Marry seems to be hesitant to leave her family and her husband but finally she accepts the offer of the fairy child to go with her and die.

The play closely depicts Yeats’ love of his Irish homeland and the various myths and legends concerning fairies and a kind of fairy land where human beings are lured to enter. The incidents in the play happen on May Eve, in Ireland. “May Eve is a time when fairy folk have the extremist power to affect a man and in that time the magic of fairies is strongest” (Ross 2009: 353).

"Thus for his drama of faeryland, *The Land of Heart's Desire*, the world of the Celtic twilight offered Yeats the rich texture of folklore. Mary Bruin, the young bride who is beguiled away by the call of the faery world "where nobody gets old and godly and grave", represents a universal longing but is distinctly Irish" (O'Connor 1965: 375).

Jeffares (1975) argues that Yeats chose common Irish names in town, Sligo, because they are vague and mystical (24). Even the title of the play is very confusing as it refers to the otherworld. The title describes the otherworld positively as the world of immortality and the world that is free of sorrow and free of suffering of the mortal world (Jin 2008: 7) (265) The literature of landscapeism is about the natural mysticism. It is clear that the beloved Silgo is Yeats' land of heart's desire. The land is famous for its amazing unspoilt beaches and natural landscapes. Yeats visualizes Ireland in this play, because we can see easily the Irish customs and beliefs through the setting of it, Yeats describe the setting of the play as follows:

SCENE,- A room with a hearth on the floor in the middle of a deep clove to the right. There are benches in the clove and a table; and a crucifix on the wall. The alcove is full of a glow of light from the fire (Yeats 2010: 65).

What we see here is that Yeats depicts and creates two Irelands: the two worlds of the mortals and the mystical world behind it. It is explicit that Yeats creates an illusion here. "He claims that the mystical world can be entered only through the death" (Pokorna 2012: 55). Skelton & Knowland (1965) it is observed that Yeats had a large number of heterogeneous interests and ideas in his early works. The Tir-Nan- Og and the ideal world were central in Yeats's early works (65). Heather McNeil (2001) explains the meaning and the importance of Tir Nan Og in the Irish culture and literature; he describes it as "a land of everlasting young, where there is no pain and suffering, and where the fairies live in peace and pleasure. Tir nan Og, the Land of the ever young, the Celtic heaven, is said to lie somewhere west of the Hebrides" (73). It was strongly believed that a big float would ferry those elect ones across the waves to the island in which there was no human suffering and death.

"Yeats focuses on the conflict between the realm of the supernatural world and the natural world, this conflict belongs essentially to his spiritual transformations in his early life" (McMillan 2009: 50). It is obvious that there is a conflicting quarrel between the different worlds. One is a mystical realm of fantasy represented by the fairy child and the other one is Christian Orthodoxy world embodied by Father Hart who is a man of reason (Jin 2008: 6). Scarborough (1917) describes this struggle between mortal and immortal forces, as the struggle between the divine forces and the power of Sidhe; she admits that the fairy child wins by the power of Sidhe to take the soul of Mary which is left to the fairyland for ever:

"The Land of Heart's desire. The story of the struggle between the divine and mortal forces and the power of the Sidhe to claim the soul of the young wife and the triumph of the fairies, by which the girl's body falls lifeless by the hearth while her spirit, speeds away to live forever in the land "where nobody gets old or sorry or poor," has a poignant pathos, a wild dreamy beauty that touches the heart" (241).

The Sidhe is considered to be liberation from the daily hard work of the Irish people because the image of the Otherworld is seen as a way to escape from the dullness of their lives. Actually, Sidhe means the settlers of the Otherworld.

Mary reads folk tales with pleasure at the beginning of the play. She is rejecting to do her housewife duties as a newly wedding bride. Father Hart knows that she has an interest in the old book, because he is aware that the book will influence Mary in that time (McMillian 2009: 50). The story of the book which Mary is reading is about a princess who ponders to escape from the dull and ordinary life. Father Hart asks her what she is reading?

**FATHER HEART:** You should not fill your head with foolish dreams

what are you reading?

**MARY:** How a price of Edain.

A daughter of a king of Ireland, heard

A voice singing on May Eve like this,

And followed, half wake and half sleep

Until she come into the Land of Fairy,

Where nobody gets old and godly and grave,

Where nobody gets old and crafty and wise,

Where nobody gets old and biter of tongue,

And she is still there, busied with dance

Deep in the dewy shadow of a wood,

or where stars walk upon a mountains-top (Yeats 2010: 67).

It demonstrates how the mystical world of fairy and the supernatural is introduced by Yeats. He introduces the mystical world of fairy and the supernatural elements in it positively, the Otherworld is described as “a blissful with motifs of beauty, dance, everlasting and endless joy” (Jin 2008: 3). It is understood that Mary’s voice describing the afterlife is a reflection of her happiness. But as a man of reason Father Hart is the opinion that it is not wise to believe in such stories which he regards as foolish dreams, so he begs Mary to stop reading such things and warns her of their danger (Ibid., 4).

The quarrel is given as following:

**FATHER HART:** Put it away my colleen.

God spreads the heavens above us like great wings.

And, give a little round of deeds and days.

And then come the wrecked angels and set snares.

And bait them with light hopes and heavy dreams (Yeats 2010: 67).

Father Hart's exchange proves another opposition between Christianity and the mystical traditions between him and the fairy child. As the fairy child knows well the great power of the cross, Father Hart is to remove the Crucifix from the room (McMillian 2009: 53). It can be inferred that the child will not feel at ease till the Crucifix is removed from the room.

The following exchanges show how the child denounces God.

**THE CHILD:** What is that ugly things on the black cross?

**FATHER HART:** You cannot know how naughty your words are!

**THE CHILD:** Hide it away!

**BRIGET:** I have begun to be afraid again.

**THE CHILD:** Hide it away.

**MAURTEEN:** That would be wickedness!

**BRIGET:** That would be sacrilege.

**THE CHILD:** The tortured things! Hide it away!

**MAURTEEN:** Her parents are to blame.

**FATHER HART:** That is the image of the son of God.

**THE CHILD:** Hide it away. Hide it away. Finally,

**FATHER HART:** because you are so young and like birds,

That must take fright at every stir of leaves,

I will go take it down. (Yeats 2010: 75).

The fairy child comes up as a winner because Father Hart who was fooled by the innocence of the unknown child removes the Crucifix. The removal of the Crucifix is a turning point in the play as Father Hart, unintentionally, invites the evil to enter their house. Jeffares (1975) puts it as "the irony by which it is Father Hart's action that releases Mary from the protection of his moral orthodoxy" (25). This removal of the Crucifix symbolizes Yeats's abandonment of Christianity and "his acceptance for more heterogeneous beliefs, since he replaced the crucifix by fairies" (McMillan 1975: 25). To Grene (2004), in Christianity the fairies are regarded as evil spirits and disciples of Satan (55).

Music is a powerful tool for Yeats to deal with the world of fays and spirits. Nenyeyi (2002) asserts that the vitality of the music as a tool used by the fairy child to lure Mary to come with her to the other world, where she can with spirits, plays a significant role (51). Nenyeyi furthers the argument as "The unknown, singing Voice offers Mary a world where,

corresponding to her with, she can dance and the tongues that surround her would not make her weary, but it warns her as well: in this house she is lonely of heart, there is not a soulmate with whom she could talk to: if she does not follow her heart's desire, she will wither away" (51).

Hassan (2015) "Mary who lives an active boring life shows her corresponding to the fairy child after luring her by dance and song"(49).

**THE CHILD:** Put on my shoes, old mother.

Now I would like to dance now I have eaten,

The reeds are dancing by Coolaney lake,

And I would like to dance until the reeds.

And the white waves have danced themselves sleep (Yeats 2010: 75).

The fairy child's dance is a form of mysticism. That mysticism lures Mary to enter the otherworld. Mores (1993) asserts that the significance of the dance in the play is that it is used as a means used by the fairy to lure Mary from the physical world into the otherworld. "The dance of the fairy in *The Land of the Heart's Desire* casts a spell on the young woman and tempts her give up physical life" (32).

To Nenyeyi (2002), "Yeats was very enthusiastic toward the dance but that not sufficient reason", and she claims "it is very difficult to explain the main reason, from the point of view of dancing Yeats' plays are so different that it is almost impossible to say anything general about them" (49). The dance functions as an instrument of the supernatural power. Just after the removal of the cross, dance also means passion but it is not a romantic one. It may evoke some feelings of unclear unearthly love and passion. Her magical power may be hindered if the cross were not removed from there. "The orthodoxy power of the cross represents an obstacle in the face of magical power; therefore, the dance here is equal to magic"(Ibid., 49).

The action takes place during Midsummer Eve. According to the ancient folk tales, the fairies and the supernatural have their highest level over the mortals (Jeffares 1975: 24). In the play some events and names are depicted as ambiguous creatures. Once Mary puts the branch of the quicken wood on the door, she is touched by a mysterious creature. The quicken is a sacred tree, mountain ash and a tree which is thought to be sacred (Ibid., 24).

When Mary sees a small child come from the forest, she removes the quicken wood.

**MARY:** I had no sooner hung it on the nail,

Before a child ran up out of the wind;

She has caught it in her hand and fondled it.

Her face is pale as water before dawn (Yeats 2010: 68)

Throughout the play we sense a sense of mystery underlying the superstition of the peasants and the fairy child's stealing of the quicken wood which is thought to protect the cottage against any form of evils and evil-doers. Mary's passion for the fairies and the removal of the quicken wood allows the evil and magical spirits to enter the house. When the fairy child knocks on the door Mary realizes that there is an arm asking for to come in.

**MARY:** There is somebody out there that beckoned me,

And raised her hand as though it held a cup,

And she was drinking from it, so it may be

That is thirsty (Yeats 2010: 69)

Then, Mary sees a little queer old woman with green clothes whose tongue and face are so strange to her. On another occasion she sees a small man who begs for a fire.

**MARY:** A little queer old woman dressed in green.

Both the tongue and face were strange.

**MARY:** A little queer old man.

Made me a sight to show he wanted a fire.

To light his pipe (Yeats 2010: 72).

The exchange of milk is a pretext for the appearance of the supernatural strangers in the Irish folklore traditions. Mary gives milk to the old woman.

**BRIDGET:** She is given milk away.

I know she would bring evil on the house (Yeats 2010: 69)

Macateer (2010) describes the magical significance of milk in the ancient Irish traditions, as following: "Indeed, it employs the same idea we encounter in the land of heart's desire and Cathleen Ni Holihan: exchange of the milk as a catalyst for a supernatural intervention that is, in its turn, sign of an epochal change" (34). The new bride Mary's giving milk to the old woman is really symbolic.

**BRIDGET:** The good people beg for milk and fire

Upon May Eve – woe to the house that gives,

For they have power upon it for a year.

**MAURTEEN:** Hush, woman, hush.

**BRIDGET:** she's given milk away.

I knew she would bring evil on the house (Yeats 2010: 69).



It is fact that the Irish climate is wet, misty and rainy, so the water and the weather is one of the major components of the Irish people's identity. The motif of dew is related to the fairyland (Pokorna 2012: 66). Dew has something supernatural in its nature. "The dew are the drops of water appear every morning on the grass and tree's leaves without any clear reason such as rain or snow, this could be seen a magical in the past" (Ibid., 66).

**MARY:** Where nobody gets old and biter of tongue.

And she is still there, busied with dance.

Deep in the dewy shadow of a wood.

Or where stars walk upon a mountain-top (Yeats 2010: 67).

It is clear that Mary wants to dance in the dewy shadow of a wood. It shows the mystical significance of the dew.

The natural phenomena such as rain and wind have some sense of transcendental power. The play traces back to the Irish folklore, so the motif, wind, is used to evoke the mystical feeling in the audience of Yeats. "The importance of the wind as a chief symbol in the play can be marked when it carries away the promises which were to protect the family, also the family believe that the wind has taken them" (Pokorna 2012: 79).

**THE CHILD:** Here is level ground for dancing; I will dance.

The wind blows out of the gates of the day.

The wind blows over the lonely heart,

And the lonely of heart is withered away (Yeats 2010: 76).

What can be inferred is the appearance of the birds as a motif is a complete vision of mysticism. "In Irish folklore the motif of transforming of a soul into a white bird at the moment of death was common" (McMillian 2009: 60).

**THE CHILD:** White bird, white bird, come with me little bird.

**MARY:** She calls me.

**THE CHILD:** Come with me, little bird. (Yeats 2010: 80).

It is known that Yeats uses various dominant figures from Celtic-Irish mythology. "Aengus is an Irish legendary bird and considered as the Irish god of love. Fiachra is an ancient myth who was transformed into a swan by her spiteful stepmother and the evil figure Finvara" (McMillian 2009: 60). Yeats's characters give a link to his mystical writing.

**THE CHILD:** You shall go with me, newly-married bride.

White-armed Nuala, Aengus of the birds.

Feacra of the hurtling foam, and him.

Who is the ruler of the western Host,

Finvarra, and their Land of Heart's Desire,

Where beauty has no ebb, decay no flood,

But joy is wisdom, Time an endless song.

I kiss you and the world begins to fade (Yeats 2010: 78).

The child emphasizes the influence and mystical power in transforming Mary into a bird. All in all, Yeats' representation of the mystical and supernatural elements in his play has mystical dimensions and the differing worlds: the supernatural world or mystic world is based on mythology and the real and natural world rests with Christian Orthodox traditions. Yeats demonstrated the scene in the real world for a battle between fancy and faith. The clashes of worlds have been displayed with reference to the Irish myths.

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