

Beyond Mimicry: The Lacanian Real in the Theatre of Yeats and Shakespeare

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Great paintings shouldn't be in museums. Have you ever been in a museum? Museums are cemeteries. Paintings should be on the walls of restaurants, in dime stores, in gas stations, in men's rooms. Great paintings should be where people hang out. You can't see great paintings. You pay half a million and hang one in your house and one guest sees it. That's not art. That's a shame, a crime.¹

The terms of art are totally different from the terms of life.²

This paper will analyse the polarities and similarities that exist between Yeats and Shakespeare in terms of approach to the creation of meaning within theatrical performance. Following an assessment of the presentation of reality in the theatre, an analysis of each playwright's approach to his audience will be offered. The focus will then turn to the 'emotion of multitude', considered to be central to a theatre of value by Yeats.³ Further topics addressed will be the performance dynamic created by the usage of sub-plots, situational and vocabulary-related shadowing and, finally, dramatic techniques in the field of symbolism. A recurring

¹ Bob Dylan, 1965. See Cott, Jonathan, (ed.), *Dylan on Dylan* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2006), p. 54.

² See Gina Masucci Mackenzie, *The Theatre of the Real* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2008), p. 4.

³ See William B. Yeats, 'Emotion of Multitude' in, *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats, Volume 4: Early Essays*, ed. by Richard J. Finneran and George Bornstein (New York: Scribner, 2007) pp. 159-160.

theme throughout the investigation will be the artist's relationship to the western mimetic tradition. The conclusion will suggest that both playwrights systematically employ definable literary techniques to create theatrical moments which aim to evoke a reaction in the audience which might be termed a succumbing to the Lacanian Real.⁴ This process involves the creating of a space, or void, within the psyche via interpretation-based interaction between the audience member and the performance elements, and a consequent momentary transformation of the self by the self.

'In the film [*Renaldo and Clara*], the mask is more important than the face.'⁵

The playwright's attention to the relationship between reality and the theatrical presentation of reality is commonly employed as a source upon which to base definition, or categorization, of the artist's approach and output. From the writings of Aristotle to the most-recent scholarly assessment of theatre performance, the critic finds himself returning to that most elusive of concepts, the role of 'mimesis' within the momentary presentation of fictions. An analysis of the performance texts of Yeats and Shakespeare, alongside critical comment on the relationship between the reality of reality and the reality of art highlights how the two vastly different theatrical approaches of these two playwrights unite in projecting the belief that the mimetic approach to art is profoundly and fundamentally

⁴ See Mackenzie, pp. 1-39

⁵ Bob Dylan, 1978. See Cott, Jonathan, (ed.), *Dylan on Dylan* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2006), p. 177.

flawed, consequently directing their art towards the creation of the Lacanian Real, and aggressively questioning the goal of verisimilitude in performance.⁶

The suggestion here is that the traditionally accepted position of the audience in regard to the performance, that of the habitually referenced ‘willing suspension of disbelief’, as defined by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (in reference to poetry, it might be noted), is both antiquated and inaccurate.⁷ In her analysis of ‘the Orphic bringing-into-being’ that, she asserts, is central to the Shakespearean performance canon, Pauline Kiernan, for example, suggests that a slight variation on Coleridge’s analysis would be more accurate:

The audience is frequently reminded that what is being presented is not the truth, and that the characters are not real people, but fictional creations played by real people. The response it elicits is one in which we believe the fiction, and not, we take the fiction to be the truth.⁸

Kiernan clarifies this position further through apposite reference to the theories presented by Keir Elam:

In our own century, semioticians have refuted the Coleridgean position. In *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, Keir Elam defines what he terms ‘dramatic possible worlds’ as ‘hypothetical (“as if”) constructs’,

⁶ For an insightful assessment of the role of the Lacanian Real in theatre, see Gina Masucci Mackenzie, *The Theatre of the Real* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2008), pp. 1-39.

⁷ See Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, 1817, Chapter 14.

⁸ See Pauline Kiernan, *Shakespeare’s Theory of Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 91.

recognized by the audience as ‘counter factual (i.e. non-real) states of affairs’ that are ‘embodied as if in the actual here and now’. Because ‘the spectator’s awareness of the counterfactual standing of the drama...is a necessary constant it is not necessary to accept the Coleridgean notion of the audience’s “suspension of disbelief” in the presented world.’⁹

Acceptance or rejection of the Coleridgean ‘willing suspension of disbelief’ will clearly direct the approach to verisimilitude within the theatre. To investigate this notion further, it is first necessary to refer to the advice presented on the employment of mimesis in poetic fiction within Aristotle’s prescriptive teachings on appropriate theatrical practice. It is logical to begin with Aristotle’s assessment of the role of the poet:

Like the painter or any other artist, the poet aims at the representation of life; necessarily, therefore, he must always represent things in one of three ways: either as they were or are, or as they are said to be or seem to be, or as they ought to be.¹⁰

Implicit in this suggestion is the belief, or even assumption, that the ‘reality’ imitated by the poet must be recognizable to the spectator as the ‘reality’ he/she experiences outside of recognized fiction. Verisimilitude, in some form or another, is, according to Aristotle, vital to the communicability of the performance. This is emphasized further by Aristotle’s promotion of the need for the ‘probable or necessary’ within theatrical art.¹¹ This notion is presented in relation to character

⁹ Ibid., p. 93.

¹⁰ See Betty Radice (ed.), *Aristotle, Horace, Longinus: Classical Literary Criticism*, (trans. by T. S. Dorsch), p. 69.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 43.

which, 'to give the best illusion of reality, should follow accepted ideas of how persons of certain ages, ranks, and professions behave'.¹² This, of course, leads to a paradox as the initial drive towards verisimilitude in the presentation of character logically leads towards 'a doctrine of fixed types, consistent throughout each work and also from work to work'.¹³ The conflict is clear; any creation of 'type' in the field of character might be categorized as being in opposition to the processes of verisimilitude in fiction as 'individual men in nature do not always act according to type, and contrasting styles and tones might better represent reality and thus better serve the dramatic illusion'.¹⁴

Here the focus naturally turns to the audience as it would appear that the playwright's acceptance or rejection of verisimilitude, on any given level, is directly related to his or her understanding of the status of the spectator whilst a performance is in progress. Aristotle famously, if indirectly, defined the spectator as a civilian in need of repeated moral and ethical instruction and, consequently, promotes usage of a degree of verisimilitude (the unity of action, for example) to form a readily comprehensible framework within which the required instruction can be embedded.¹⁵ Castelvetro, in stark comparison, aggressively denied the need for ethical/moral instruction in the theatre whilst, interestingly, promoting greater verisimilitude in performance.¹⁶ Castelvetro's argument

¹² See Marvin Carlson, *Theories of the Theatre: A Historical and Critical Survey, from the Greeks to the Present* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1983) (expanded edition, 1993), p. 55.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56.

¹⁵ See Radice (ed.), pp. 31-75.

¹⁶ See Carlson, pp. 47-51.

centres upon his belief that ‘poetry was invented solely to delight and to recreate’,¹⁷ and his assessment of the audience as being unable to ‘understand the reasons or the distinctions of the argument – subtle and far from the usage of the unlearned – which philosophers utilize in investigating the truth of things and artists in regulating the arts’.¹⁸ In the opinion of Castelvetro it is necessary, therefore, to accept the intellectual limitations of the audience. Castelvetro’s damning indictment of his audience expands into the suggestion that ‘it is not possible to make them believe that several days and nights have passed when their senses tell them that only a few hours have passed’.¹⁹ The theatre of Castelvetro is, then, a theatre of concession to the perceived limitations of the audience. It is a theatre which would, one might assume, receive considerable support from Sir Philip Sidney:

For where the stage should always represent but one place, and the uttermost time presupposed in it should be, both by Aristotle’s precept and common reason, but one day: there is both many days and many places, inartificially imagined... You shall have Asia of the one side [of the stage], and Affrick of the other, and so many other under-kingdoms, that the Player, when he cometh in, must ever begin with telling where he is: or els, the tale will not be conceived. Now ye shall have three Ladies, walke to gather flowers, and then we must beleeve the stage to be a Garden. By and by, we heare news of shipwracke in the same place, and then wee are to blame, if we accept it not for a rock. Upon the backe of that comes a hideous Monster, with fire and smoke, and then the miserable beholders are bounde to take it for a Cave. While in the meantime, two Armies flye in, represented with foure swords and

¹⁷ See Lodovico Castelvetro, *Poetica d’ Aristotele vulgarizzata e sposta* (Basel, 1576), 29.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 57, 209.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 535.

bucklers, and then what harde heart will not receive it for a pitched field? Now, of time they are much more liberall, for ordinary it is that two young princes fall in love. After many traverces, she is got with childe, delivered of a faire boy, he is lost, groweth a man, falls in love, and is ready to get another childe, and all this in two hours' space: while how absurd it is in sence, even sence may imagine, and Arte hath taught and all aunient examples justified.²⁰

It is now appropriate to turn the focus of the investigation towards the perception of the audience within the theatrical approaches of Shakespeare, a close-contemporary, and, in terms of theatre theory, opponent of Sidney, and Yeats. It can be argued that it is this perception that encourages or restricts any given performance's movement towards the theatre of the Lacanian Real.

Any analysis of Shakespeare's assessment of the needs, desires, and limitations of his audience logically develops into an analysis of the playwright's attitude towards mimetic representation on the Elizabethan/Jacobean stage. In regard to Castelvetro, the degree of mimetic approach displayed by the playwright reflects his or her perception of audience role in the theatrical event. In the case of Shakespeare there is, of course, no extant criticism produced by the playwright himself, other than that that can be deduced by dissection and interpretation of the plays themselves. Kiernan highlights Shakespeare's repeated repudiation of mimetic representation on stage through references to key episodes in *Love's Labour's Lost*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Hamlet*, and *Troilus and Cressida*.²¹ Of key interest is the following

²⁰ See Sir Philip Sidney, *The Defense of Poesy*, ed. A. S. Cook (Boston: 1890), p. 48.

²¹ See Kiernan, pp. 91-126.

speech made by Ulysses in *Troilus and Cressida* :

And, with ridiculous and awkward action
Which, slanderer, he 'imitation' calls,
He pageants us. Sometime, great Agamemnon,
Thy topless deputation he puts on,
And like a strutting player, whose conceit
Lies in his hamstring and doth think it rich
To hear the wooden dialogue and sound
'Twixt his stretched footing and the scaffoldage,
Such to-be-pitied and o'er-wrested seeming
He acts thy greatness in. (1.3.149 – 158)

Kiernan accurately highlights the fact that in this instance, as in others throughout the Shakespearean canon, the 'o'er-wrested seeming' is found in acts that 'pervert and distort nature in the process of imitating her'.²² In Shakespeare's approach to the creation of theatre, the goal of verisimilitude can only lead to artistic failure. Shakespeare's audiences, then, are presented with the 'real world' of the play, which is then undermined by open and repeated evocations of the realities inherent to the process of theatre itself. Here, then, there is strong movement away from the traditional western practice of focusing on theatre 'as representation or imitation'.²³ Arguments concerning the degree to which the fictional aspects of the performance are believed or accepted by any given audience member, and the degree to which the non-representational aspects of progressive theatre are interpreted, or experienced, by the audience are, however, deeply problematic and highly unstable. Regardless

²² See Kiernan, p. 97.

²³ See Mackenzie, p. 13

of this, of importance is the fact that the foundation upon which Shakespeare's theatre is built consists of a network of theatre as truth intertwined with theatre as artifice. The negotiations for meaning that the audience members undertake when consuming a performance of a Shakespearean play take place within this contradictory arena. Play is play, but interpretation is real. The audience, then, are asked to be entertained and reactive interpreters. This, of course, recalls the play-within-the play episode in *Hamlet*, in which the various reactions of Hamlet and Claudius translate both figures into ideal Renaissance theatre audience members.²⁴ In many respects, Claudius is a theatrical depiction of an audience member displaying 'the Lacanian concept of the Real, or the psychic position of complete break with...one's ties to Symbolic convention, and Imaginary phantasy'; *The Murder of Gonzago* both cripples and liberates the murderous king.²⁵

In contrast to Shakespeare, Yeats' approach to the role of the audience in theatre performance has been documented at considerable length by the playwright and poet himself. Initially striking is Yeats' desire to direct the audience towards participation in the re-awakening of aspects of Irish culture. The audience, for Yeats, is a body of people to be moulded and translated by the theatrical performance witnessed. It is surely undeniable that, if the terms of the playwright are to be accepted, the theatre of Yeats was (and is) an artistic means towards a socio-political end. A logical consequence of this field of Yeats' theatrical ambition is the need for an intelligent, perceptive audience with attuned interpretive

²⁴ See *Hamlet*, Act 3, Scene 2.

²⁵ See Mackenzie, p. 1.

skills. This is intimated at in the following anecdote, as told by Yeats in the May 1899 edition of *Beltaine*:

I remember, some years ago, advising a distinguished, though too little recognized, writer of poetical plays to write a play as unlike ordinary plays as possible, that it might be judged with a fresh mind, and to put it on the stage in some small suburban theatre, where a small audience would pay its expenses. I said that he should follow it the year after, at the same time of the year, with another play, and so on from year to year; and that the people who read books, and do not go to the theatre, would gradually find out about him. I suggested that he should begin with a pastoral play, because nobody would expect from a pastoral play the succession of nervous tremours which the plays of commerce, like the novels of commerce, have substituted for the purification that comes with pity and terror to the imagination and intellect. He followed my advice in part, and had a small but perfect success, filling his small theatre for twice the number of performances he had announced; but instead of being content with the praise of his equals, and waiting to win their praise another year, he hired immediately a big London theatre, and put his pastoral play and a new play before a meager and unintelligent audience. I still remember his pastoral play with delight, because, if not always of a high excellence, it was always poetical; but I remember it at the small theatre, where my pleasure was magnified by the pleasure of those about me, and not at the big theatre, where it made me uncomfortable, as an unwelcome guest always makes one uncomfortable.²⁶

Implicit to this anecdote is the understanding that a successful theatrical event requires an informed audience. The relationship between play and audience member is not, therefore, that of the entertaining instilling reaction within the entertained, but is, rather, the cultural artifact instilling

²⁶ See William B. Yeats, *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats, Volume 8: Irish Dramatic Movement*, ed. by Mary FitzGerald and Richard J. Finneran (New York: Scribner, 2003), p. 147.

and reinforcing awareness of the local human condition within the spectator. This awareness must, of course, be generated by the audience member him/herself and, consequentially, focused, aware, and educated (according to the playwright's definition) audience members are required.

Yeats' essay, 'Ireland and the Arts' (1901), begins with the declamation 'The arts have failed'.²⁷ In this essay, Yeats expresses mournful regret at a perceived decrease in the number of people who are interested in the arts. He communicates, however, a profoundly ambitious hope that a wide-reaching interest in the arts can be awakened. His proposal for directed action amongst the community of artists is laced with an intense pseudo-religious passion:

We who care deeply about the arts find ourselves the priesthood of an almost forgotten faith, and we must, I think, if we would win the people again, take upon ourselves the method and the fervour of a priesthood. We must be half humble and half proud. We see the perfect more than others, it may be, but we must find the passions among the people.²⁸

Yeats felt that his responsibility was to return faith to the consumers of his art and simultaneously evoke two passions: 'love of the Unseen Life', referring to Blake's invisible essence, and a patriotic 'love of country'.²⁹ The aim was to re-create an Ireland that is conscious of its great history and legends, as estimated by Yeats, through art's igniting of these two passions. The suggestion is that Yeats expresses the belief that the

²⁷ See William B. Yeats, 'Ireland and the Arts' (1901) in *Ideas of Good and Evil* (London: Bullen, 1903), p. 320.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 320-321.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 322.

playwright, or poet, can revitalize, and enrichen his nation by reawakening, or, indeed, newly creating a faith-based mythology built upon local, but largely forgotten, cultural reference points. The connection with the Lacanian Real here is worth noting. Yeats expresses a wish to reawaken the Irish people to their cultural and mythological roots through the presentation of carefully directed dramatic art. The dramatist is asking selves to change selves within the space, or opportunity, provided by the performance.

Inherent to the success of such an ambitious artistic project is a wide-reaching influence rendered possible by popularity. Contradictions, however, arise:

He [the artist] must picture saint or hero, or hillside, as he sees them, not as he is expected to see them, and he must comfort himself, when others cry out against what he has seen, by remembering that no two men are alike, and that there is no ‘excellent beauty without strangeness.’³⁰

This analysis of the responsibility of the artist is, as intimated by the statement itself, inconsistent with a drive for popular appeal. Indeed, Yeats pronounced this opinion in plainer terms by announcing that ‘no writer, no artist, even though he choose Brian Boroihme or S. Patrick for his subject, should try to make his work popular’.³¹ It is perhaps this aspect of Yeats’ approach to his art that lead, at least in part, to his lack of success as a playwright. Yeats depended on his audience adjusting to accept his visions: the ‘strangeness’ within his performance-based

³⁰ Ibid., p. 327.

³¹ Ibid., p. 326.

representations resulting from his uncompromising artistic principals. George Steiner clearly suggests that the weaknesses found in Yeats' art are related to a lessening in the ability of the target audience to process and accept myth:

Yeats' failure to construct a mythology for the age is part of that larger failure or withdrawal from imaginative commitment which occurs after the seventeenth century. Greek tragedy moved against a background of rich, explicit myth. The landscape of terror was entirely familiar to the audience, and this familiarity was both a spur and limit to the poet's personal invention. It was a net to guard from ruin the acrobatics of his fancy. The mythology at work in Shakespearean drama is less formal, being construed of a close yet liberal conjunction of the antique and Christian world view. But it still gave to reality shape and order.³²

Yeats' own fictional output suggests that it is possible that his failure to attract and awaken a wide audience was not lost on himself. The old man in *The Death of Cuchulain*, written in the final stages of his life, scornfully talks about the intellectual declines of the age:

I am sure that as I am producing a play for people I like, it is not probable, in this vile age, that they will be more in number than those who listened to the first performance of Milton's *Comus*. On the present occasion they must know the old epics and Mr. Yeats' plays about them; such people, however poor, have libraries of their own. If there are more than a hundred I won't be able to escape people who are educating themselves out of the Book Societies and the like, sciolists all, pickpockets and opinionated bitches.³³

³² See George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), p. 319.

³³ See William B. Yeats, 'The Death of Cuchulain' in *The Collected Plays of W. B. Yeats* (New York: Macmillan, 1934), p. 438.

This gradual wearying of the common people's flawed interaction with artistic output, and consequent resignation to limitations in audience numbers is, it could be argued, essentially a reflection on public reaction to the artist's portrayal of reality. Once again, attention turns to artistic representation of the human experience and the artist's approach to, or rejection of, mimetic representation. Yeats himself intimates towards the relationship between approach to mimetic representation and popular acceptance of art presented to the public forum:

I began *The Shadowy Waters* when I was a boy, and when I published a version of it six or seven years ago, the plot had been so often re-arranged and was so overgrown with symbolical ideas that the poem was obscure and vague. It found its way on to the stage more or less by accident, for our people had taken it as an exercise in the speaking of verse, and it pleased a few friends, though it must have bewildered and bored the greater portion of the audience. The present version is practically a new poem, and is, I believe, sufficiently simple, appealing to no knowledge more esoteric than is necessary for the understanding of any more of the more characteristic love poems of Shelley or of Petrarch. If the audience will understand it as a faery-tale, and not look too anxiously for a meaning, all will be well.' ³⁴

Yeats' focus, then, is on the communication of meaning through means beyond the parameters of mimesis. This is to say that much of Yeats' theatre, like much of Shakespeare's theatre, falls outside of the traditional western genre of representation and imitation. The playwright and poet's ambitions, however, appear to have been largely incompatible with

³⁴ See William B. Yeats, 'The Arrow: 24 November 1906: *The Shadowy Waters*' in *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats, Volume 8: Irish Dramatic Movement*, ed. by Mary FitzGerald and Richard J. Finneran (New York: Scribner, 2003), p. 185.

contemporary audiences and theatre settings. Yeats' verbal illustration of his ideal theatre, as included in the Preface to *Plays for an Irish Theatre*, inadvertently communicates the reasons for his failure to reach a mass audience:

If we would give our theatre the dignity of a church, of a Greek open air theatre, of an Elizabethan platform stage, and cannot be content with any of these, we must have a scene where there is no painted light and shade, and that is but another way of saying, no realism, no objects represented in mass (unless they can be copied exactly as we can sometimes copy an interior), and the mechanism of this scene must as little as possible prevent the free and delicate use of light and shadow.

When we have made this change in obedience to a logic which has been displayed in the historical development of all the other arts, we shall have created a theatre that will please the poet and the player and the painter. An old quarrel will be ended, the stage will be beautifully decorated, every change will be full of meaning and yet never create a competing interest, or set bounds to the suggestions of speech and motion. At last liberated from the necessity of an always complete realization, the producer, recovering caprice, will be as free as a modern painter, as Signor Mancini let us say, to give himself up to an elliptical imagination. Gloster will be able to fall but from his own height and think that he has fallen from Dover Cliff, and Richard's and Richmond's tents can face one another again. We shall have made possible once more a noble, capricious, extravagant, resonant, fantastic art.³⁵

A release from the pedantic realism of the theatres of Victorian Britain is seen by Yeats as an opportunity to employ 'light and shadow' to permit 'a theatre that will please the poet and the player and the painter'.

³⁵ See William B. Yeats, W. B., *Plays for an Irish Theatre*, (A. H. Bullen: London, 1911), pp. xii-xiii.

Once again, the movement appears to be towards creating a theatre of the Lacanian Real. Of importance, however, and in complete contrast to Shakespeare's within-the-play comments on theatre, is the absence of reference to the audience satisfactorily consuming the theatre produced. Indeed, Yeats' statements on theatre regularly express dissatisfaction with his audiences:

It is necessary to explain these things, as the old Irish mythology is still imperfectly known in modern Ireland.³⁶

We [creators of theatre] will give you nothing that does not please ourselves, and if you do not like it, and we are still confident that it is good, we will set it before you again, and trust to changing taste.³⁷

While it cannot be denied that the theatre of Yeats is famed for its ability to alienate the spectator, a central goal of each performance, as outlined by Yeats, is to communicate the 'emotion of multitude' to the audience.³⁸ This performance objective is explained in the essay, 'Emotion of Multitude' (1903), in which Yeats offers a critical assessment of the failures inherent to the structures and forms found within modern theatre.³⁹ The poet and playwright reaches the conclusion that the central lack stems

³⁶ See William B. Yeats, 'Beltaine: May 1899 – Plans and Methods' in *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats, Volume 8: Irish Dramatic Movement*, ed. by Mary FitzGerald and Richard J. Finneran (New York: Scribner, 2003), p. 146.

³⁷ See William B. Yeats, 'Samhain: 1906 – Notes' in *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats, Volume 8: Irish Dramatic Movement*, ed. by Mary FitzGerald and Richard J. Finneran (New York: Scribner, 2003), p. 188.

³⁸ See William B. Yeats, 'Emotion of Multitude' in Yeats, William B., *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats, Volume 4: Early Essays*, ed. by Richard J. Finneran and George Bornstein (New York: Scribner, 2007), pp. 159–160.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

from the crucial omission of the ‘emotion of multitude’, a failing which, Yeats claims, is displayed by the theatre culture of France due to its omission of the Chorus.⁴⁰ It follows, of course, that this vital element of theatre is, in Yeats’ opinion, present within Greek drama due to the requirement of a Chorus ‘which called up famous sorrows, even all the gods and all heroes to witness, as it were, some well-ordered fable, some action separated but for this from all but itself’.⁴¹ Indeed, Yeats even suggests that this prized and sought after holy grail of theatre, the ‘emotion of multitude’, is found in the work of Ibsen and Maeterlinck ‘for they get multitude from the wild duck in the attic, or from the crown at the bottom of the fountain, vague symbols that set the mind wandering from idea to idea, emotion to emotion.’⁴² The sense, then, is that the ‘emotion of multitude’ is the result of a successful broadening of the play’s scope which allows for the performance to raise awareness or emotion in the audience member where previously there was a ‘lack’ or ‘void’, once again recalling the processes central to the Lacanian Real. In his discussions on this ‘emotion of multitude’, Yeats refers to Shakespeare:

The Shakespearian drama gets the emotion of multitude out of the sub-plot which copies the main plot, much as a shadow upon the wall copies one’s body in the firelight. We think of *King Lear* less as the history of one man and his sorrows than as the history of a whole evil time. Lear’s shadow is in Gloucester, who also has ungrateful children, and the mind goes on imagining other shadows, shadow beyond shadow, till it has pictured the world.⁴³

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 159.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 159–160.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 159.

As Yeats proposes, a shadowing of Lear's condition is, indeed, clearly prevalent within Shakespeare's work:

GLOUCESTER His daughters seek his [Lear's] death. Ah, that good Kent,
 He said it would be thus, poor banished man!
 Thou sayst the King grows mad; I'll tell thee, friend,
 I am almost mad myself. I had a son,
 Now outlawed from my blood; a sought my life
 But lately, very late. I loved him, friend;
 No father his son dearer. True to tell thee,
 The grief hath crazed my wits. (3.4.153 – 160)

Gloucester's circumstances clearly parallel those of Lear. Both are betrayed by their children, and both make the tragic journey from paternal authority to tragic insanity. Their suffering flows through the whole play within a combined network of circumstance, the dual nature of which communicates aspects of the general human condition above aspects of any given individual's life experience. A. C. Bradley extends the argument by embellishing his comments upon Shakespeare's employment of the parallel secondary plot in *King Lear* with the suggestion that the sequencing of scenes concerned is of key importance:

King Lear has a secondary plot, that which concerns Gloster and his two sons. To make the beginning of this plot quite clear, and to mark it off from the main action, Shakespeare gives it a separate exposition. The great scene of the division of Britain and the rejection of Cordelia and Kent is followed by the second scene, in which Gloster and his two sons appear alone, and the beginning of Edmund's design is disclosed.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ See A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904; 3rd edition, London: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 34-35.

GLOUCESTER Because I would not see thy cruel nails
Pluck out his poor old **eyes**, nor thy fierce sister
In his anointed flesh stick boarish fangs.
(3.7.54 – 56)

GLOUCESTER I have no way, and therefore want no **eyes**.
I stumbled when I saw. Full oft 'tis seen
Our means secure us, and our mere defects
Prove our commodities. (4.1.18 – 21)

GLOUCESTER Alack, I have no **eyes**.
Is wretchedness deprived that benefit
To end itself by death? 'Twas yet some comfort
When misery could beguile the tyrant's rage
And frustrate his proud will. (4.5.60 – 64)

LEAR Howl, howl, howl, howl! O, you are men of stones.
Had I your tongues and **eyes**, I'd use them so
That heaven's vault should crack. She's gone for ever!
(5.3.232 – 234)

LEAR I have seen the day, with my good biting falchion
I would have made them skip. I am old now,
And these same crosses spoil me. Who are you?
Mine **eyes** are not o' th' best. I'll tell you straight.
(5.3.251 – 254)

It could be argued that the function of the word 'eyes' in *King Lear* points towards Yeats' belief that repetition of symbolic images allows the world of the play to stretch beyond the parameters of the fictional societies of the dramatis personae proper. There are, for example 5 usages of the word 'eyes' in the final scene of the play, and some 11 usages

in Act 4, Scene 6. (It should also be noted that there is a total of 37 usages of the word ‘eyes’ in *King Lear*, considerably more than in any other play in the canon.) The suggestion is, then, that Shakespeare’s usage of ‘eyes’ in this play exemplifies the ‘shadow’ technique highlighted and supported by Yeats. Through this expansive usage of the word, themes and connotations associated with sight and blindness populate the semiotic system of the play like communicative shadows embedded within the performance.

Yeats’ theatrical objective of awakening an ‘emotion of multitude’, is, it would seem, a clearly identifiable aspect of Shakespearean theatre. Indeed, Yeats himself extends his promotion of evocation of the ‘emotion of multitude’, through systematic paralleling, or shadowing, into an analysis of the structuring of *Hamlet*:

In *Hamlet*, one hardly notices, so subtly is the web woven, that the murder of Hamlet’s father and the sorrow of Hamlet are shadowed in the lives of Fortinbras and Ophelia and Laertes, whose fathers, too, have been killed. It is so in all the plays, or in all but all, and very commonly the sub-plot is the main plot working itself out in more ordinary men and women, and so doubly calling up before us the image of multitude.⁴⁶

Yeats suggests, then, that Ophelia and Laertes reflect Hamlet’s sadness as they grieve for their lost father, Polonius, while the very presence of Fortinbras signifies the death of his father. (Interestingly, Yeats accurately includes Fortinbras in his list of fatherless children despite

⁴⁶ Ibid.

the limited stage time offered to the figure.) They add their melody of weeping to Hamlet's main melody, and these married voices echo off one another to evoke an aural illustration of a generic human condition, a condition of the multitudes, over and above a depiction of a given individual's tragic situation. This shadowing, like that employed in *King Lear*, is reflected in the language of the play; in this instance the vocabulary given to each of these representations of fatherless children. Hamlet's expression of disgust at the suddenness of the remarriage of his mother, following the death of his father, contains a telling moment of praise for the deceased:

So excellent a king, that was to this
Hyperion to a satyr; so loving to my mother
That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly. (1.2.139 – 142)

The prince's grief-ridden description of an 'excellent' father and king who was also a gentle and protective husband is recalled by Ophelia's crazed, yet mournful reaction to her father's murder:

There's fennel for you, and columbines. There's rue for you,
and here's some for me. We may call it herb-grace o' Sundays.
O, you must wear your rue with a difference! There's a daisy. I
would give you some violets, but they withered all when my father died.
(4.5.179 – 184)

The 'shadowing' here is found in the reference to the father figure

protecting his love. Hamlet's father was 'so loving' to his mother that he would not desire 'the winds of heaven' to 'visit her face too roughly'. Polonius' death leads, according to Ophelia, to the withering of violets, a flower bearing direct associations with Venus, death and love. The intimation is that tragedy lies in the fact that in both instances, the death of the leading male, the father, is accompanied by the death of a caring, protective love for the female family member. The death of Polonius thus closely shadows the death of King Hamlet.

In similar fashion, Hamlet's combining of exclamations of grief with cries for vengeance is shadowed by Laertes' protestations on hearing of the death of his father:

HAMLET Yet I,
 A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak
 Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,
 And can say nothing-no, not for a king,
 Upon whose property and most dear life
 A damned defeat was made. Am I a coward?
 Who calls me villain, breaks my pate across,
 Plucks off my beard and blows it in my face,
 Tweaks me by th' nose, gives me the lie i' th' throat
 As deep as to the lungs? Who does me this?
 Ha? 'Swounds, I should take it; for it cannot be
 But I am pigeon-livered and lack gall
 To make oppression bitter, or ere this
 I should 'a' fatted all the region kites
 With this slave's offal. Bloody, bawdy villain!
 Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!

O, vengeance! -
Why, what an ass am I! Ay, sure, this is most brave,
That I, the son of the dear murder'd,
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words
And fall a-cursing like a very drab,
A scullion! (2.2.568 – 590)

LAERTES And so have I a noble father lost,
A sister driven into desp'rate terms,
Who has, if praises may go back again,
Stood challenger, on mount, of all the age
For her perfections. But my revenge will come.
(4.7.25 – 29)

Here the presentation of Laertes as the son of a murdered father shadows Hamlet's situation and, consequently, universalizes the emotional reaction of the individual. Of note, however, is the disparity between the concise certainty of Laertes' 'But my revenge will come', and Hamlet's enormously famous and, indeed, paralysing verbosity, which appears to be motivated by terminal uncertainty. Here the aspect of contrast between shadow and central subject is as important as the aspect of similarity.

Whilst Yeats focuses primarily on *King Lear* and Hamlet in his discussions on Shakespeare's design and usage of sub-plot, investigation into the Shakespeare canon reveals usage enough of such technique to suggest that a degree of Shakespeare's creative output is profoundly formulaic. In *Othello*, for example, Iago re-communicates the Othello condition by becoming the title-figure's shadow:

confess and be hanged for his labour. First to be hanged
and then to confess! I tremble at it. Nature would not
invest herself in such shadowing passion without some
instruction. It is not words that shakes me thus. Pish!
Noses, ears, and lips! Is't possible? Confess? Hand-
kerchief? O devil!

He falls down in a trance (4.1.35 – 42)

The shadow, then, catches the main character in a trap, the basis of which reflects the shadow's own mental state.

It is possible that repetitions of, or variations upon, a theme within a given play, as exemplified by the shadowing of characters/themes in *King Lear*, *Hamlet* and *Othello* permit the generation of symbolic qualities to be attached to the characters which, in turn, encourages the very theatrical goal that Yeats strove to achieve; a broadening of meaning beyond the parameters of the fictional world presented capable of producing reaction and action in the audience.

Although a degree of repetition clearly takes place when exercising this technique, the shadow figures do not represent direct and complete copies of the leading figures. The suggestion is that this is not mere “tautology”, but is rather a “digression of meanings” within analogy and association as in Yeats' ‘poetic method of masks’, as discussed by Kenichi Kihara in 『イエイツと仮面 — 死のパラドックス』.⁴⁷ Kihara focuses on the image of “the lion and the honeycomb” from the last stanza of Yeats'

⁴⁷ See Kenichi Kihara, 『イエイツと仮面 — 死のパラドックス』 (東京: 彩流社, 2001), pp. 257-283.

‘Vacillation’⁴⁸ and suggests that Yeats connects image to image through the employment of an associative chain of essential identification that seems to lack logical connections.⁴⁹ It is feasible that Yeats’ ‘poetic method of masks’ is related to, or is a version of, Shakespeare’s shadowing technique. Shakespeare, in tandem with Yeats’ poetic method of masks, bestows essential identification features on his figures, then positions them in various contexts within the societies of the play. This permits the generation of a kaleidoscope of related images during any given performance whilst simultaneously embracing a digression of meanings. These images are then unified by a chain of association that reflects the appropriate essential identification features as the performance progresses. This aspect of unity is very important in Yeats’ plays, for Yeats aimed to give expression to the extreme, and the successful achievement of this necessitated the inclusion of intensity. In attempts to create this required level of intensity, Yeats sought to unify the onstage emotions inherent to the performance. This artistic process is directly related to Yeats’ theory of the ‘one great memory’.⁵⁰ The 3 doctrines created by Yeats and attached to this theory are as follows:

- (1) That the borders of our mind are ever shifting, and that many minds can flow into one another, as it were, and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy.

- (2) That the borders of our memories are as shifting, and that our memories are a part of one great memory, the memory of Nature herself.

⁴⁸ See ‘Vacillation’ (1933) in *Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1977), pp. 282–286.

⁴⁹ See Kihara, pp. 257–283.

⁵⁰ See William B. Yeats, ‘Magic’ in *Ideas of Good and Evil* (London: Bullen, 1903), pp. 29–69.

(3) That this great memory can be evoked by symbols.⁵¹

These doctrines are approached by Yeats in his 1901 essay, 'Magic', in which he communicates the belief that any given human's memories can flow into any other human's inner-life and memories.⁵² This creates the potential for the creation of one great inner-life and one great memory. Of interest here is not the accuracy, or lack thereof, of this assessment of the spiritual potential of human beings, but rather Yeats' belief that 'symbols' are a means to awaken and key into 'this great memory', and consequently deemed a powerful and essential literary tool by the spiritual poet. In 1896, Yeats famously proposed that 'a symbol is indeed the only possible expression of some invisible essence, a transparent lamp about a spiritual flame; while allegory is one of many possible representations of an embodied thing, or familiar principle, and belongs to fancy and not to imagination: the one is a revelation, the other an amusement'.⁵³ Of key importance here is the pairing of 'only' and 'revelation'; the intimation is that the employment of the symbolic plays a central role in Yeats' creative output. His assessment of two lines of poetry by Burns serves to explain his reverence for the communicative potential of the symbolic:

In 'Symbolism in Painting' I tried to describe the element of symbolism that is in pictures and sculpture, and described a little the symbolism in poetry, but did not describe at all the continuous indefinable symbolism which is the substance of all style.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ See William B. Yeats, 'William Blake and His Illustrations to the *Divine Comedy*', in *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1961), pp. 116-145, p. 116.

There are no lines with more melancholy beauty than these by Burns-

‘The white moon is setting behind the white wave,
And Time is setting with me, O!’

and these lines are perfectly symbolical. Take from them the whiteness of the moon and of the wave, whose relation to the setting of Time is too subtle for the intellect, and you take from them their beauty. But, when all are together, moon and wave and whiteness and setting Time and the last melancholy cry, they evoke an emotion which cannot be evoked by any other arrangement of colours and sounds and forms.⁵⁴

Here Yeats proposes that symbols are a means through which communication of content ‘too subtle for the intellect’ can be attained and, through which, specific, otherwise indefinable emotions can be evoked. Symbolic art is, therefore, differentiated from- and rendered superior to- allegorical art. This view is supported by an unnamed German Symbolist whose opinions Yeats recalls in his 1898 essay titled ‘Symbolism in Painting’ :

The German insisted with many determined gestures, that Symbolism said things which could not be said so perfectly in any other way, and needed but a right instinct for its understanding; while Allegory said things which could be said as well, or better, in another way, and needed a right knowledge for its understanding. The one gave dumb things voices, and bodiless things bodies; while the other read a meaning- which had never lacked its voice or its body- into something heard or seen, and loved less for the meaning than for its own sake.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ See William B. Yeats, *Ideas of Good and Evil* (London: Bullen, 1903), pp. 241-242.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 227-228.

Yeats' use of symbolism is, however, famously problematic. Indeed, Richard Gill, in producing instructional criticism aimed at the intermediate student population adopts an almost apologetic tone when discussing the symbolic aspect of Yeats' output:

The biggest problem with Yeats' symbols... is that in addition to using traditional ones he creates new ones. The problem is whether he can make these public enough, so that his readers can see what they stand for.⁵⁶

Here lies a commonly accepted flaw in Yeats' approach to the evocation of meaning through symbolism, a flaw which is, perhaps, directly related to the poet and playwright's relationship with his audience. Communication between parties requires an arena of semantic agreement if the producer's intended meaning and the receiver's perceived meaning are to exhibit an acceptable degree of unity. Yeats, however, is generally adjudged to stray beyond the arena of semantic agreement into an idiosyncratic symbolism identifiable by its displays of self-assigned meaning as opposed to culture-assigned meaning. Gill compares Yeats' two Byzantium poems to highlight this point. The stanza directly below is taken from *Sailing to Byzantium* (1927):

That is no country for old men. The young
In one another's arms, birds in the trees
-Those dying generations-at their song,
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long

⁵⁶ See *W. B. Yeats: Selected Poems*, ed. Richard Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 121.

Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.
Caught in that sensual music all neglect
Monuments of unageing intellect.⁵⁷

Gill is accurate in his suggestion that ‘the difference in *Sailing to Byzantium* between the world of ‘Whatever is begotten, born and dies’ and the world of the ‘Monuments of unageing intellect’ establishes a traditional contrast between nature and art that is sustained throughout the poem’.⁵⁸ The term ‘traditional contrast’ suggests that the symbolism employed falls within a semantic arena recognizable to both poet and reader. Gill claims, however, that *Byzantium*, written in 1930, contains examples of symbolism which fall outside such a semantic arena, rendering areas of the poem largely incomprehensible. Problematic terms, for Gill, include ‘bobbin’, ‘mummy-cloth’ and ‘winding path’ from the second stanza, below:⁵⁹

Before me floats an image, man or shade,
Shade more than man, more image than a shade;
For Hades’ bobbin bound in mummy-cloth
May unwind the winding path;
A mouth that has no moisture and no breath
Breathless mouths may summon;
I hail the superhuman;

⁵⁷ See William B. Yeats, ‘Sailing to Byzantium’ in *Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1977), pp. 217–218.

⁵⁸ See *W. B. Yeats: Selected Poems*, ed. Richard Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 121.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

I call it death-in-life and life-in-death.⁶⁰

The point is clear. Yeats' choice of symbol occasionally veers away from that that can be readily understood, or satisfactorily consumed by his audience. As a result, communicative drive is lost and opportunities for instantaneous awakenings of the theatre of the Lacanian Real are lessened. Steiner's suggestion that successful symbolic representation is necessarily based on history and ritual helps to develop this argument:

In Shakespeare's sovereign contempt for limitations of space and time, we recognize the spirit of the mystery cycles which took the world of heaven, earth, and hell for their setting, and history of man for their temporal scale ... a legacy of ritual and symbolic proceeding which goes back to the imaginative wealth of the Middle Ages.⁶¹

It can indeed be argued that the drama of Shakespeare, in its profoundly theatrical negation of the boundaries presented by the laws of space and time, directs the audience member towards a return to a form of ritual designed to encourage a level of human consciousness beyond everyday experience. Analysis of Jaques' 'Seven Ages' speech from Act 2, Scene 7 of *As You Like It* helps to explain this further:

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players.
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,
Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms.

⁶⁰ See William B. Yeats, 'Byzantium' in *Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1977), pp. 280-281.

⁶¹ See Steiner, p. 22.

Then the whining schoolboy with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then, a soldier,
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,
Jealous in honour, sudden, and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the justice,
In fair round belly with good capon lined,
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws and modern instances;
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts
Into the lean and slippered pantaloon,
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side,
His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank, and his big, manly voice,
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
That ends this strange, eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything. (2.7.139 – 166)

The 'seven ages' listed by Jaques denote an apparently simplistic summary of life, and introduce a chronological series of audience-imagined masks into the performance. At one level, these masks simply constitute an instantly recognizable caricature of a recognizable phase of human life, whilst, at another level, they symbolize and evoke the seemingly endless depths of human experience and emotion that accompany each of these stages. Like the theatrical mask worn by actors throughout the ages, the images delivered by Jaques communicate an apparently paradoxical

unity of the temporal and the everlasting. The individual human's life is temporary, but the human experience is ever ongoing; a ritual to be repeated and replayed endlessly. Jaques' speech, then, could be interpreted as an aural bringing-into-being of seven masks which unite to symbolize the duality of the immortal / mortal human experience. In his discussion on masks, Yeats expresses support for such communicative stagecraft:

A mask will enable me to substitute for the face of some commonplace player, or for that face repainted to suit his own vulgar fancy, the fine invention of a sculptor, and to bring the audience close enough to the play to hear every inflection of the voice. A mask never seems but a dirty face, and no matter how close you go is yet a work of art.⁶²

In the process of communicating aesthetic concerns in regard to the employment of masks in theatre performance, Yeats here, once again, aligns his theatre with that of the Lacanian Real. Of note is the phrase, 'A mask never seems but a dirty face, and no matter how close you go is yet a work of art'.⁶³ The mask, as an essentially anti-realist stage property in that its very essence speaks of its artistic, or theatrical qualities, encourages the audience member to interpret beyond mimicry, break the ties with conventional theatre consumption patterns, and transgress into self transformation of self.

⁶² See William B. Yeats, *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats, Volume 4: Early Essays*, ed. by Richard J. Finneran and George Bornstein (New York: Scribner, 2007), p. 166.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

It is appropriate to close with Yeats' comments on the 'masks of tragedy'.⁶⁴ This brief assessment of these iconic objects in the world of theatre clearly suggests that the 'changes of state' inherent to the Theatre of the Lacanian Real appear to have been one of Yeats' primary concerns, and a key objective of his theatre-based output. Change and transformation take precedent over the sterile comfort of self-affirming entertainment:

The masks of tragedy contain neither character nor personal energy. They are allied to decoration and to the abstract figures of Egyptian temples. Before the mind can look out of their eyes the active will perishes, hence their sorrowful calm. Joy is of the will which labours, which overcomes obstacles, which knows triumph. The soul knows its changes of state alone, and I think the motives of tragedy are not related to action but to changes of state.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ See William B. Yeats, *Autobiographies* (London: Macmillan, 1970), p. 471.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

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