Mythology and Religion in the Works of William Butler Yeats, Seamus Heaney, and Andrew Hozier Byrne

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Abstract

Irish poets William Butler Yeats, Seamus Heaney, and Andrew Hozier Byrne skilfully use mythology and religion in their works to express their own roles in their country as voices of the people, voices of freedom and change, and to witness and capture political, cultural, religious, and personal change, growth and significance. All three poets are deeply influenced both by their Irish national identity and the complex and difficult Irish history, which can be seen in their poetry. The paper will show that their usage of motifs, references and allusions to Catholicism and (Irish and classical) mythology in the selected poems serves to address all the important events of their lives as Irish men, and their lives as individuals with their freedom to be the artists they want to be in Ireland, and in the world.

Keywords: mythology, religion, W. B. Yeats, S. Heaney, Hozier, Ireland

Contents

Introduction

William Butler Yeats, Seamus Heaney and Andrew Hozier Byrne are Irish poets whose works define both Modernist and Postmodernist Ireland's literature and music from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present. Ireland today is a country undergoing rapid change and transformation. After a difficult history that included poverty, civil wars, hunger, lack of freedom in every sense, and living within the confinements of what the Catholic Church allowed, Ireland finally enters a new era – the era of growth and progress. Despite all these inevitable changes, the Irish people, as any other nation, will always understand their poets and artists best if they use religion and mythology in their works.

Religion and mythology have always been the glue that ties a nation together, and this was a fact well known to Yeats, Heaney, and Hozier. By analysing the selected poems this paper will show that each of them uses specific motifs, references or allusions to Irish or classical mythology, or religion in order to highlight their national identity as Irish poets, but also that their messages are universal: love, freedom, human rights, and a peaceful world are not their kind wishes just for Ireland.

The first chapter contains an overview of mythology and religion in Ireland and defines how these three Irish poets belong to modernist and postmodernist Ireland. The second chapter focuses on the analysis of mythology and religion in W. B. Yeats's poems "The Four Ages of Man" and "The Second Coming." This is followed by the third chapter, in which the focus is on the analysis of mythology and religion in Seamus Heaney's poem "Hercules and Antaeus." The final chapter's focal point is the analysis of mythology and religion in Andrew Hozier Byrne's song "Arsonist's Lullaby." This is followed by a Conclusion and the list of sources.

1. Mythology and Religion in Ireland

In an attempt to understand a specific nation, one must always research that nation's mythology and religion, because this is where the roots of its history, culture, and art begin. Mythology and religion denote how people live, what they pray and hope for, how they celebrate or mourn, and what they find absolutely sacred in their lives. Both reveal their history, their present, and can show at least a glimpse of their future. Mythology and religion can define a country's nationality through art and culture. William Butler Yeats, Seamus Heaney, and Andrew Hozier Byrne were and are well aware of the power of using motifs of religion and mythology in their art (poems and songs). Their poems are incredibly rich with references to classical mythology, Ireland's mythology, and Catholicism, and are often a reaction to ongoing events, struggles, fights, or turmoil in both Ireland, and worldwide. They, as artists and poets, understand the importance of including those specific motifs of religion and mythology, and have recognized it as one of the best ways to reach the hearts and minds of Irish people, but also of people all around the world. In order to surmise their intentional and unceasing usage of motifs of religion and mythology in their works, one should look closely into Ireland and its religion and mythology.

Just a century ago, Ireland was still a country that worshipped the *side*. The *side* was a type of Pantheism, "a religion which considered nature as being inhabited by divine beings" (Wagner 1). More familiar to the public as "'The Wee Folk' or *Bunadh na gCnoc* 'The People of the Hills,' were believed to inhabit not only heights, prehistoric burial places or tumuli as well as wells, springs, river-sources and lakes, but also the bottom of the sea and enchanted islands, which, according to folk-belief are visible only every seventh year" (Wagner 1-2). The most unusual and interesting part is the absence of the idea that there is a heaven above the sky. According to Wagner's research, the Celts believed that a plethora of divine and demonic beings cohabitate with humans in the nature. As in any mythology, those divine and magical creatures display a duality of good and evil. And one can easily imagine that those gods, semi-gods and magical creatures inspired the names of Ireland's breathtaking mountains, hills, pastures, rivers, lakes and wells of Ireland. The names of the Gods and their forms are very similar in Celtic mythology, Near-Eastern mythology, Gaelic mythology, Sumerian tradition, and Greek mythology (Wagner 10). Irish myth and the Irish national consciousness are very closely related: "Using the pseudonym 'Donat O'Donnell', [Conor Cruise O'Brien] writes: 'To

be Irish is not primarily a matter of blood or birth or language: it is the condition of being involved in the Irish situation, and usually of being mauled by it' [3]" (Sayers 272).

In order to define the Irish myth, one first needs to define myth, which can be a problematic term because it implies an invented story, a fictitious narrative, individual, an object, that has no existence in fact. A myth can be considered a euphemism for something false or a lie, or a story involving a supernatural force, person, action or event, and embodying a popular idea concerning natural or historical phenomena (Sayers 272). Older definitions explain that "[t]he word 'myth' derives from the Greek word *muthos*, which means 'speech,' that is to say, the Words of the Gods—divine expression or divine knowledge. Here, then, the term 'myth' connotes divine or quintessential truth and not fallacy" (Sayers 272). If myth is a sacred story, then the "Irish myth" refers to a sacred story intimately connected to Ireland and Irish people. According to Sayers, Irish writers Yeats and O'Connor believe that, by studying the Irish myth, one can reclaim the wisdom of some golden age, and find clues to the meaning of life (Sayers 274). This emotional, romantic approach highlights the claim that "myth is the product of a different age and a different people, whose culture was completely unlike our own and whose cultural representations express assumptions, values and ways of perceiving things which are totally out of place in the modern world" (Sayers 274). In the modern non-academic world, myths are usually closely connected to fantasy and often serve as a tool of the entertainment industry. Sayers explains the shallowness and lack of cultural value of the recently very popular representation of Irishness: "As such, they rank with the likes of a shamrock motif on the head of a pint of Guinness or the leprechauns for sale on the Dublin ferry, as examples of untrammelled Paddywackery" (Sayers 275). This promotion of a superficial, consumerist-marketed Irish myth can strengthen defamatory stereotypes of Irishness and present a nation given to blarney and superstition (275). This is just a step away from promoting and selling folktales on the global market, regardless of the truth and history. The importance of myth is aptly explained as:

> the language of life at the extremes—all that is left when ordinary language fails to articulate the extraordinary. It is a flight from prose and conscious deliberation to a kind of raw poetry. It strains to express something about the ineffable—that which is beyond words, but which becomes tangible when humanity is confronted by the remorseless power of the divine, or of love, loss, suffering, fear, birth, death and the joy of being alive. Myth provides a language that helps those who use it to perceive, interpret and experience these fundamental aspects of

> life. It enables them to put into words and make sense of extraordinary circumstances and to express their understanding to others and to themselves. Myth enables a coherent experience of the abundance of life. (Sayers 276)

Connolly's research of the history of Irish religion demonstrates a duality of both preserving the old religion (Pantheism) while attempting a devotional revolution as a Reformation of the Irish Church. This was not an easy task: "the failure of the Irish Reformation was due, not to any unusually strong attachment of the population to their traditional faith, but rather to the inability of the established church to develop an effective strategy of evangelisation" (Connolly 4). After reviewing the data regarding mass attendance in both rural and urban settings in the second half of the nineteenth century, it became obvious that "the boundaries between newer and older religious cultures were not quite as clear-cut as the statistics of mass attendance, taken in isolation, would suggest" (Connolly 13). This was evident when cholera spread from Europe to Ireland, and Irish people desperately and panicky distributed pagan tokens of protection amongst themselves. In 1895, a woman named Bridget Cleary was "tortured and eventually burned alive by her husband and members of his family, all of whom had become convinced that they were dealing with a fairy changeling that had to be driven away in order to restore the real Bridget" (14). This shocking event absolutely discovered a belief in the non-Christian supernatural powers in the middle of a supposed devotional revolution's peak. These two events denote that "it might be wise not to attempt too great a leap from the changes in religious practice that appear to have taken place in the second half of the nineteenth century to an assumed transformation in mentalities" (15).

By the second half of the twentieth century, Mass attending statistics shows that Catholic religious practice was at its peak in 1974 when 90% of Catholics attended Mass at least once a week; but, by 1998 the figures dropped to only 60% of Catholics who attended Mass at least once a week (Connoly 20). The numbers are in constant decline, and this might be due to the devastating effect of a series of sexual scandals, and especially because of repeated allegations of both widespread and worldwide sexual abuse of minors. According to Connolly, besides urbanisation and industrialisation, the Irish have turned their back to organized religion and traditional values in favour of "the adaptation of selected aspects of traditional Irish culture to a globalised entertainment market" (21). Connolly believes that the reinvention of the Irish national personality, defined as a genial secular hedonism, the phenomenon of the Irish pub, and gender equality helped in the process (21). It is fair to say that the political power of the

Catholic Church with all its restrictions, oppressions, and limitations is not trending positively among the Irish youth. According to Central Statistics Office, preliminary results from a census of the population taken in 2022 show that Ireland, a country worldwide known as a Catholic country, is becoming less religious: just over half (53%) of residents of Ireland's capital, Dublin, now identify as Catholic. The overall percentage of Catholics in the entire country is now less than 69%. The results are quite shocking if we take into consideration that just 12 years ago, that percentage was 84,2%, and in 2006 about 90% of Irish citizens self-identified as Catholics. Moreover, 14% of Irish residents now claim that they have no religion at all ("Census"). Ireland is rapidly changing so the alienation from religion and its doctrines is nothing unusual.

Despite this decline, religion and mythology are still important in Ireland. They induce a certain lifestyle, and literature and art are still beyond saturated with motifs of both Pantheism (the pagan Ireland), Catholicism, and Irish mythology, as this paper will show. Whereas William Butler Yeats is a Modernist poet, Seamus Heaney, and Andrew Hozier Byrne are Postmodernists. The context of the period is crucial for the comprehension of their historical background, their themes and motifs, their style of writing, and their roles as poetic and political voices of their country, and even beyond the borders of their country.

Modernism as a socio-cultural and literary theory was "fuelled by industrialization and urbanization and by the search for an authentic response to a much-changed world" (Kuiper). Historically, Modernism as a literary movement follows the aftermath of World War I and demonstrates the horrid effect that such a devastating war had on human race (Kuiper). According to Kuiper, Modernist literature reflected hopelessness, despair, shock, and "a sense of disillusionment and fragmentation." In the face of such despair, it is a natural response in a human being to search for hope, renewal and redemption, which is the primary theme of T. S. Eliot's long poem "The Waste Land" (1922), a representative Modernist poem (Kuiper). Irish writer James Joyce published his novel *Ulysses* also in 1922, and it was considered a leading light in the development of Modernist literature. Joyce used "a technique known as stream of consciousness, which commonly ignores orderly sentence structure and incorporates fragments of thought in an attempt to capture the flow of characters' mental processes" (Kuiper). In addition to these two authors, William Butler Yeats can be viewed as one of the central practitioners of Modernist poetry because his poetry and aesthetics are of key importance to the history of Modernism due to their exacting self-reflexivity (Fogarty 128). Fogarty claims that

"[t]hey reflect upon key preoccupations of modern verse, such as the nature of subjectivism, the links between tradition and modernity, the necessity for form, the desire for transcendence, the question of artistic autonomy and the intersection between politics and literature" (128). Fredric Jameson detects that Modernism is trying to free itself of tradition by implementing a new cultural order, but is still cornered with rewriting the narratives of the past (qtd. in Fogarty 130). As explained by Fogarty, Ireland was late with its literary Renaissance, so Modernism was actually the Irish literary revival:

> It united numerous different cultural, political and economic initiatives, all of which shared the aim of reawakening national self-interest and spearheading the quest for independence from British rule. For example, such diverse groups as the Gaelic Athletic Association, launched in 1884 to sponsor native Irish games, the cooperative movement, set up by Sir Horace Plunkett in 1889 to foster rural development, and the Gaelic League, founded by Douglas Hyde in 1893 to promote the Irish language, were expressions of a broad-based search for political autonomy and for the retrieval and reformulation of a collective ethnic identity. (129)

Pethica's research titled "Yeats, Folklore, and Irish Legend" emphasizes that Yeats's involvement in the revival was great because he, as a poet, tried to answer the burning question of how to save what is truly Irish at its core, how to define Irish national identity, and to make it all visible and tangible to the people of Ireland on a scale of culture and politics. Although Yeats was Irish, Irish language was not his forte, so he compensated for it with the attempt to intermarry the dual traditions of his country, and write in English. He investigated the oral culture of the Irish countryside by collecting all the supernatural legends and stories about the *side* and fairy folk. His goal was to recover and rediscover the old and immemorial. Yeats believed that this ancient wisdom would inspire revolutionary art (Pethica 129-136). He published a folklore compilation in 1893 in *The Celtic Twilight* (Pethica 129). Yeats described "Irish rural belief systems with the distantiating scrutiny of an ethnographer and the empathetic insight of a storyteller" (Fogarty 131). Although Yeats, as a true patriot, collected, translated, and delivered traditional folk tales, he was the one who chose the form. By reinventing that form, he is a true Modernist poet.

Postmodernist literature, in relation to Modernist literature, is also a literary period that results from a global sense of tragedy: a horrid plague-like event for humankind that came in the shape of the Second World War. Thus, Postmodernism in general can be associated with

power shifts and dehumanization of the aftermath of the Second World War, and the invasion of consumer capitalism (Mambrol). As Mambrol explains, Postmodern literature, although without a unified definition, is a form of literature which is marked, stylistically and ideologically, by a reliance on literary conventions and techniques such as pastiche, intertextuality, metafiction, fragmentation, temporal distortion, magic Realism, both minimalism and maximalism, paradox, unreliable narrators, parody, paranoia, dark humor, authorial self-reference, and reader involvement ("Postmodernism"). Postmodern literary writers have been greatly influenced by many various philosophical movements and ideas, seeing that these:

> unifying features often coincide with Jean-François Lyotard's concept of the "metanarrative" and "little narrative," Jacques Derrida's concept of "play," and Jean Baudrillard's "simulacra." For example, instead of the modernist quest for meaning in a chaotic world, the postmodern author eschews, often playfully, the possibility of meaning, and the postmodern novel is often a parody of this quest. (Sharma and Chaudhary)

Mambrol further explains that Postmodern literature often rejects the boundaries between "high" and "low" forms of art and literature, as well as the distinctions between different genres and forms of writing and storytelling. Postmodernist works are often fragmented, and do not easily convey the story, or even a solid meaning. They are deliberately ambiguous, and allow the reader multiple interpretations. The individual idea, the main character or event, is often dehumanized, and without a central goal in life. The tragedy of fragmentation and disorientation of the contemporary world, and losing touch with the reality are no longer tragic in the postmodern literature, but even celebrated and accepted as the only possible way of existence. Disorder is the leitmotif of the Postmodern era ("Postmodernism"). It "corresponds to the age of nuclear and electronic technologies and Consumer Capitalism, where the emphasis is on marketing, selling and consumption rather than production. The dehumanized, globalized world, wipes out individual and national identities, in favour of multinational marketing" (Mambrol).

In order to explain Postmodernism in Ireland, one needs to pay special attention to a Postmodernist tendency to always interrogate traditional notions of truth, even by dismissing all narratives that could question the mere foundations of truth (Cosgrove 381). Truth above all means contempt towards any attempt to distort something that is real or true in its essence:

> Or when Richard Rorty happily accepts the epistemological breakthrough at the end of the eighteenth century which generated the belief that "anything could be made to look good or bad . . . by being redescribed," (Contingency, p.7), one must ask how many redescriptions it would take to make famine in Ethiopia, or the devastation in Honduras, look "good." (Cosgrove 382)

Seamus Heaney is more than ready to answer to such a challenge. He makes sure that the entire truth of violence, war and injustice is captured in his poems: "The linguistic space of the poem, however, is repeatedly invaded by the realities of political atrocity and sectarian assassination" (Cosgrove 383). This trait, so narrowly attributed to Postmodernists, is very important for understanding Heaney and his position and role as a poet in Northern Ireland. Additionally, Andrew Hozier Byrne, a musician and songwriter, could easily be recognized as a Postmodernist Irish poet. He uses characteristics of Postmodern literature such as intertextuality, humour, irony, pastiche, and magic Realism, and always soundly speaks the truth about the changing and changed world through his lyrics.

2. Mythology and Religion in William Butler Yeats's Poetry

According to the biographical data available on the website dedicated to Nobel prize winners, William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) was born in Dublin. The young Yeats was very idealistic and influenced by Romantic ideas, so naturally, he was active in societies that attempted an Irish literary revival. His first volume of verse was published in 1887, but the amount of poetry he published could not come close to his work on plays and dramatic production. With his colleague, Lady Gregory, he founded the Irish Theatre, later known as the Abbey Theatre, and worked as its head playwright before the movement was joined by another colleague, Irish playwright John Synge. His plays usually tell stories about Irish legends; they often reflect his interest in mysticism and spiritualism. *The Countess Cathleen* (1892), *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894), *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902), *The King's Threshold* (1904), and *Deirdre* (1907) are among his best known plays. He became an Irish Senator in 1922. Yeats won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1923, and oddly, only for his plays. The immense volumes

he created later were, by many, even more deserving of the prize. His poetry volumes include *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1919), *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921), *The Tower* (1928), *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1933), and *Last Poems and Plays* (1940). Yeats was one of the most influential twentieth-century poets writing in English. His repeating themes are the contrast of art and life, Ireland, masks, cyclical theories of life, and the ideal of beauty and ceremony contrasting with the commotion of modern life. ("William Butler Yeats. Biographical").

By the age of 21, Yeats already knew he was choosing Romantic forms of knowledge and the realm of imagination, while consciously rejecting Late-Victorian scientific rationalism. He had an eager interest in Irish folklore and heroic legend, and the desire to create a distinctive "Irishness" as a cultural identity through master-myths of Irish nationality (Pethica 129). Everything about folklore attracted Yeats: "As a storehouse of uncanny phenomena, ancient wisdom expressed in metaphorical or allegorical forms, and traditional models of story-telling, folklore appealed to him on occult, philosophical, and literary grounds. Heroic legend likewise attracted him both emotionally and intellectually" (Pethica 129). Yeats's early literary work defined him as a folklorist who had published three volumes of folklore tales: *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* (1888), *Irish Fairy Tales* (1892), and *The Celtic Twilight* (1893). Yeats believed in the notion that "folk stories are repositories of experience and emotion more powerful and authentic than the artificial culture and art of the educated had become popular in the late eighteenth century as part of the Romantic movement's advocacy of emotion over intellect" (Pethica 131). In the wake of this passionate devotion of over two decades of Yeats's life, Romantic popularization of folk culture flourished, and scholarly folklorists gradually opened the gates to comparative mythology. Such passion, emotion, dedication towards folklore, legends, heroes, and myths proved to be problematic for Yeats who wanted to be both literary and authentic in his work (Pethica 132). Yeats's dream to construct national identity by promoting Ireland's literary, legendary, and folkloric resources brought him to a partnership with Lady Gregory. This lucrative partnership bore six long folklore articles, and provided Yeats with a colleague more skilled in the local dialect. Even later in his career, Yeats firmly holds his ties to the Irish heroic legend as an image of Irish nationality.

When it comes to Yeats's religious background, he was formally a Protestant, but Peter Allt argues that William Butler Yeats was actually not brought up in religion because his father was an agnostic (5). Many literary critics and historians find Yeats to be amusing and silly in his religious endeavours:

> Ironically, of all the poses, voices, and masks that dominate his work – Yeats the lover, the nationalist, the dramatist, the political actor of socialist or fascist leanings, the young dreamer or the wild and wicked old man – the most consistently important to him are the very personae that critics have tended over the years to make the most marginal and capricious: Yeats the hermeticist, the theosophist, the magician, the spiritualist, the occult metahistorian, or the seeker after Celtic or Indian mysteries. (Harper 146)

Yeats was involved with a secret order called the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn for decades of his life, and had a most extensive engagement with the occult. He and his wife held more than 400 sessions of a somewhat lengthy experiment of automatic writing. These sessions were the basis of Yeats's theories about life and history. Gyres were symbolic patterns he believed existed and continually spiralled through humanity's history bringing divine intervention at crucial points (for example: the rape of Leda by Zeus and the immaculate conception of Mary). From this obsession with the occult, a full blown, complex system of *A Vision* was created:

> Phases and doubled into a mirror image of itself, a second cone sharing a central point of greatest intensity. This double cone has a shadow other, its wide end linked to the narrow point of the other (which is turned into a diamond, with sharp points at the ends and wide middle) by means of a mysterious force of compression. (For a poetic illustration of the energy that causes this black-hole-like effect, note how the two parts of "The Second Coming" (VP 401–2) come together violently. (Harper 418)

These Phases are possibly divided into four quadrants, and each progression into the next one marks a change from one life stage to another.

This mechanism will be thoroughly explained through his automatic writing poem "The Four Ages of Man," which illustrates one's life in different periods of aging, and the mind's reaction to that unstoppable path that inevitably leads to death. The first stage describes human's initial struggle to even grow into a functioning, healthy, and strong being: "He with body waged a fight. / But body won; it walks upright" (Yeats 1-2). The fact that the second verse concludes by the body' victory due to walking upright means that the first battle is lost. One cannot escape growing up and maturing. A human being is forced to face that the period of being a child lulled into the stage of innocence and blissful ignorance has to come to an end. The nature of growing up implies being upright.

The second stanza explains that, after the first, the second battle is upon a human, marking the second stage of his life. If one is no longer a child, one has entered the realm of youth. Youth offers many beautiful discoveries, and as Yeats says in the third verse, they mainly concern one's emotions: "Then he struggled with the heart;" (Yeats, "The Four Ages of Man" 3). Those discoveries can include new or unknown feelings one cannot easily fathom, something as complex as being in love or loving someone; sexual maturity comes naturally, friendship is important, and knowledge about yourself and others that one could not have previously experienced emerges. All this novelty leads to the inevitable fact that: "Innocence and peace depart" (Yeats 4). One cannot stay indifferent to all those immense changes, so a human being is forced to grow up and not be a child in any form of speaking. At this point, the second battle is lost because entering adulthood often implies that innocence and peace may be forever lost.

The third stage of one's life is a pure example of an adult. An adult no longer wages a battle with their body, and is no longer captured by frivolous or simplistic urges of the body. Being an adult should, by at least some degree, indicate that one already knows one's heart, and is aware of one's role in one's love life, family, society, and country. Now his main occupation is employing his mind: "Then he struggled with the mind;" (Yeats 5). This verse means that one now struggles with using his knowledge and skills to find out why one even exists in this world, and how can one be useful to themselves and others. What is a human being's purpose? The question remains unanswered because it represents one of key philosophical questions. The second verse of the third stanza excludes one's heart in this process of rational thought: "His proud heart he left behind" (Yeats 6). To become an adult, one must find a way to reject emotions and operate within the confinements of reason and logic. One should not be led by his heart or his emotions. But this is something that could be considered an ideal scenario, because human beings cannot just turn off their emotions, and their hearts. Therefore, the third battle is also lost.

The fourth stage has a grand, hopeless, and even mythical opening: "Now his wars on God begin" (Yeats 7). As a human being ages, one becomes more aware of their mortality, fragility, weakness, and frailty, and grows fearful of what might happen next. Many become religious when they reach old age because the "great unknown," or death, is impossible to process as simply vanishing, so the idea of something divine at the very end is a way to cope. Dying is inevitable, but one might live longer than expected and, in that way, one might fight a war against God. Time and mortality are cruel and relentless. Yeats is aware of the outcome of this, the fourth battle: "At stroke of midnight God shall win" (Yeats 8). Human beings cannot escape

death, so they will always lose in a war against mortality and God: “The last stanza makes plain that not only is each battle lost, but the war itself is hopeless from the beginning. It will be important to remember that Yeats loved a good fight, and that he also knew that loss sometimes has more spiritual value than gain” (Harper 151). Yeats understood that life is a struggle, at each stage. But fighting to be the best or better versions of ourselves are battles that are won just by the sole intention to be a better human being. God might take the life of a human, but persisting in the face of difficulty and challenge will never be admitting defeat.

The paper’s analysis now turns to his other poem. “The Second Coming” is an apocalyptic poem by William Butler Yeats that foretells horrible events of Biblical proportions that lead to an inevitable End. Both the mythological and religious aspect of the apocalypse offers a universal theme of despair and hopelessness. Although the title evokes the Second Coming that most associate with the Bible and the coming of Christ, which usually denotes a more positive connotation of possible heaven for the righteous after death, the poem is hopeless, pessimistic, and if anything – nihilistic. Yeats’s attitude towards human destiny bears two concepts or stages, indicating that both the internal and external nature of a man are defective in its root:

> First is the conception of life as a tragedy; the discovery that not only are man’s victories defective, but they are temporary too; that, in the end, all his monuments crumble and totter – “wind shrieks – and where are they?” There is, secondly, the religious or apocalyptic discovery that man’s fundamental handicap is something amiss in himself; that his nature inherits the flaw theologians have known as original sin, or, in Yeatsian symbol, exhibits “the weasel’s twist, the weasel’s tooth.” (Allt 642)

Much has been written on the apocalypse, and many of those writings focus on the harbingers of the event: it is always bloody and massive, a vicious explosion that shakes the world to its very foundation. According to Fogarty, the poem is a typical “crisis lyric that conjures up the dramatic scenario of a perverted replay of the original Nativity to capture the impact of the major calamities of twentieth-century history, including the First World War, the Bolshevik Revolution and the War of Independence in Ireland” (Fogarty 135). The poem was written in 1919, and published in 1920, which is quite significant because it followed the War of Independence in Ireland, World War I and the Russian Revolution, and in its core, it is a prophecy of another chaos that humanity cannot avoid or escape.

In Yeats’s poem, the apocalypse is a much quieter event than similar real-life events (such as wars, epidemics, and so on). Its inevitability and determination are disturbing. The poem begins

with a specific disturbance in nature: “Turning and turning in the widening gyre / The falcon cannot hear the falconer; “(Yeats 1-2). The first verse introduces the gyre. As already stated, gyres were symbolic patterns Yeats believed existed and continually spiralled through humanity’s history bringing divine intervention at crucial points: “Any problem can be better understood by conceiving of it in gyres, evidently, and every philosophical, psychological, spiritual, social, historical, mathematical, astrological, astronomical, personal, public, literal, figurative, fantastical, and mundane aspect of life can be mapped successfully onto some gyre system” (Bradford). The second verse explains nature’s response to the ongoing apocalypse. Falcons are very smart and loyal animals that were used as hunting animals for centuries. They were trained to react to sounds and noises closely related to the person who trained them, and to always be alert near a prey. As seen in many works of art – when evil approaches, animals tend to behave as if they have the sixth sense, and they flee. A natural response to chaos and calamity is escape, and that is why the falcon cannot hear the falconer. The falcon instinctively runs away. The world is beginning to collapse because “things fall apart, the center cannot hold” (3). There are no longer any roots or core, all is decaying and being swallowed by a force similar to a black hole in the universe. In Yeatsian language, it is as if the outer edge of one gyre is at the beginning or centre of another (Harper 148). Along with chaos comes anarchy: “Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world” (Yeats 4). When everything is lost, no rules can any longer apply to anything. There is no hierarchy or roles because the “the blood-dimmed tide” (Yeats 5) consumes everything it touches, like an unstoppable flood that destroys the innocent as well as the foul. It does not choose; it is like an illness or like war that bears casualties regardless of who the victims are. If innocence is drowned by that bloody flood, then everything that was once set as a rule, no longer applies in this hopeless situation: “The best lack all conviction, while the worst / Are full of passionate intensity” (Yeats 7-8). Nothing makes sense, the duality of good and evil no longer applies, the roles have changed, and the Earth is now upside down.

The second stanza begins with Biblical imagery: “Surely the Second Coming is at hand” (Yeats 9), and Yeats even uses the word “revelation” to offer what seems to be a glimpse of hope that is crushed so quickly by revealing what is in that complex image. It must be noted that “Yeats believed that poets were privy to spiritual ‘after images’ of symbols and memories recurring in history, and especially available to souls of a sensitive nature such as poets” (Dalli). In this poem, the *Spiritus Mundi* plays the role of the soul of the Universe or Earth, and as a prophet, it is delivering the image of the beast that will destroy the world with every living soul in it, instead of a saviour one might expect (Dalli). The beast itself is described as appearing in

the sands of a desert, in a shape of a lion body, and the head of a man, bearing undeniable cruelty of feeling nothing for the world that is about to vanish: "A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun, / Is moving its slow thighs" (Yeats 15-16). The poet adds an unsettling image of shadows made by desert birds that aimlessly fly in shock of the event they must feel is coming (Yeats 18). The vision of that image has not happened yet because the beast is not there yet. The world is covered in darkness again; the dark drops like an unstoppable curtain on everyone and everywhere denoting eternal shade and nothingness. Yeats now knows that "Twenty centuries of stony sleep / Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle" (Yeats 20-21), which means that twenty centuries of stillness and calm have come to an end because no one can stop or avoid whatever is shaking the cradle so disruptively and violently. At the end of the poem, the poet wonders and openly asks: "And what rough beast, its hour come round at last' / Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?" (Yeats 22-23). The beast bringing apocalypse is slouching towards the place of birth of Jesus Christ to be born as the creature that will swallow the world as we know it. This is an obvious symbol that religion has failed its people.

The entire poem also reflects Yeats's dissatisfaction with "the materialism endorsed by discoveries in natural and applied science as well as the consolations and orthodoxies of mainstream Protestant Christianity" (Harper 153). Although this poem is primarily a reaction to devastating wars and political turmoil, if one reads between the lines, one might find Yeats's conclusion that Christianity has failed and will fail in providing meaning and comfort. Yeats rarely turned to Christianity, and thought that their focus on morality instead of miracle was completely misplaced (Harper 158). In this unpredictable world, with no true values, and with each new shocking event "around the corner," a miracle is needed more than morality.

3. Mythology and Religion in Seamus Heaney's Poetry

Seamus Heaney (1939-2013) was born in Count Derry in Northern Ireland. He is an Irish poet "whose work is notable for its evocation of Irish rural life and events in Irish history as well as for its allusions to Irish myth. He received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995" ("Seamus Heaney. Biography"). After graduating at Belfast's Queen's University in 1961, Heaney mostly lectured in colleges and universities in Belfast and Dublin. In 1982 he joined

the faculty of the prestigious, Ivy league, Harvard University as visiting professor, until he, in 1985, became a full professor—a position he retained while teaching at the University of Oxford from 1989 to 1994 ("Seamus Heaney. Biography"). Heaney's first poetry collection *Death of a Naturalis*t (1966) won an incredible amount of literary awards. The first major success was followed by the volume *Door into the Dark* (1969). Seamus Heaney was known for writing "in a traditional style about a passing way of life—that of domestic rural life in Northern Ireland. In *Wintering Out* (1972) and *North* (1975), he began to encompass such subjects as the violence in Northern Ireland and contemporary Irish experience, though he continued to view his subjects through a mythic and mystical filter" ("Seamus Heaney. Biography"). Among other Heaney's works are *Field Work* (1979), *Station Island* (1984), *The Haw Lantern* (1987), and *Seeing Things* (1991), *Spirit* Level (1996), *Electric Light* (2001), *District and Circle* (2006), and *Human Chain* (2010).

Being a scholar, Heaney also wrote essays on poetry and on poets like William Wordsworth, William Butler Yeats, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Elizabeth Bishop. Additionally, Heaney was one of the most lucrative modern translators, and his works included translating *The Cure at Troy* (1991), which is Heaney's version of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, *The Midnight Verdict* (1993), containing selections from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and from *Cúirt an mheán oíche* (*The Midnight Court*), written by the eighteenth-century Irish writer Brian Merriman ("Seamus Heaney. Biography"). Heaney's worldwide famous translation of the Old English epic poem *Beowulf* (1999) became an unexpected international bestseller, while his *The Burial at Thebes* (2004) gave Sophocles' *Antigone* contemporary relevance ("Seamus Heaney. Biography").

Seamus Heaney was a Roman Catholic in Northern Ireland, and he wrote from a Roman Catholic perspective, but his poetry, his compassion, and vision were larger than his religion or even Northern Ireland (Stallworthy 167). Heaney, unfortunately, witnessed the immeasurable damage of atrocities in the conflicts between Protestants and the Catholic minority he belonged to. He strongly held to the position of a witness that needs to speak out his truth, no matter what the cost, and in doing so, he used history and myth. As Hart states:

> Myth and history are asymptotic for Heaney, and since historical conflicts between Ireland and England date back even further than the Anglo-Saxons (as the Roman Empire declined the Gaels were the notorious invaders, imposing Gaelic on western parts of Roman Britain and dragging off slaves, like the future St. Patrick), it makes sense to draw on both Gaelic and Anglo-Saxon traditions to dramatize these ancient feuds. ("Poetymologies" 217)

Heaney was often described as an etymological poet. This means that his poems are like rituals that re-create the bond between word and root, a place's name and the sacred earth it rests on. Being an etymologist means that one studies roots, and this was Heaney's specialty (Hart, "Poetymologies" 213). Heaney used both religious and mythological motifs to describe the struggles between his Ireland and the oppressor England, in this case. He even resorts to the attributing "of 'feminine' qualities to Ireland and 'masculine' qualities to England" (Hart, "Poetymologies" 226). Heaney goes so far to illustrate the position of his land that he deconstructs religion and myth: "If Catholic Ireland is Virgin Mary and Gaelic muse, soft and pliable before the onslaught of England's Protestant, patriarchal Jehovah or bullish Zeus, Heaney's goal is to feminize England and masculinize Ireland" (Hart, "Poetymologies" 227). Hart further explains that Heaney carefully chooses history and myths that can exemplify most emphatically his personal dilemmas as a Catholic in the middle of constant struggle and violence of the sectarian frictions of Northern Ireland. Heaney is for Hart a mythopoeic poet, and, as such, a hidden autobiographer that captures his reality and his truth by revisiting his Irish roots, a pastoral Gaelic past, and the ever-inspiring mythology of those lands. One might even conclude that, through his mythopoeia, he dreams about a solution, a cease fire outcome, or simply an ending that does not involve such bloody and inevitable cycles and rituals of violence that are ever-present in his country (Hart, "Poetymologies" 229). Heaney's usage of myth and history are aptly illustrated in his poem "Hercules and Antaeus," which will be analysed next.

Heaney, in his Birthday speech on 13 April 2009, explains that this poem has a special meaning to him. He retells the Greek myth about Hercules, the well know Greek hero, and his fight with, "Antaeus, a giant born out of the earth and who consequently derived all his energy, strength, and skill from mere contact with the ground" ("Hercules and Antaeus"). Antaeus was, in his essence, invincible: "every time he was seemingly beaten to the ground in a wrestling match or a fight, he was actually gathering strength, recharging, preparing to proudly rise again and continue to fight" ("Hercules and Antaeus"). Heaney then emphasizes:

> I identified with this earthman because I saw myself as something of an earthman, somebody with his poetic feet very much on the local ground. At that stage I too felt fighting fit, having just written a book that began with images of a man digging, 'going down and down for the good turf,' and ended with my young poet self-looking deep into the 'trapped sky' at the bottom of a well. I therefore regarded Antaeus as something of a guardian spirit, an emblem of whatever poetic gift I might have. But at the same time, I

was also aware that Antaeus, for all his strength, was far from invulnerable; I knew indeed that he would be defeated in the end by another hero, the mighty Hercules. ("Hercules and Antaeus")

"Hercules and Antaeus," as many of Heaney's poems, is a parable of perception, and the paper now turns to its more detailed analysis. Hercules turned out to be a match for Antaeus both in the Greek myth and in Heaney's poem because he realized that the way to defeat Antaeus is to keep him away from the ground and the earth that is the source of his power. With his immense power, Hercules elevated Antaeus and defeated him by keeping him in the air until he drained him of his strength completely. In his article "History, Myth, and Apocalypse in Seamus Heaney's 'North,'" Hart noted that Heaney himself described this battle as: "a contest in which rational perception finally conquers and illuminates the dark instinctual passions of the tribe. 'Hercules represents the balanced rational light,' he says, while 'Antaeus represents the pieties of illiterate fidelity' (Interview 63)" (392). This mighty struggle is told in the style which evokes the rhetoric of myths:

Sky-born and royal,
snake-choker, dung-heaver,
his mind big with golden apples,
his future hung with trophies. (Heaney, "Hercules and Antaeus" 1-4)

The first stanza begins with the classical descriptions of the almighty hero and his feats. Hercules is a super-hero figure of royal blood, and with promising future ahead. His previous feats are admirable: he slaughtered the nine headed hydra; he cleared the Augean stables of never-ending manure, and now he has the goal to steal the golden apples of Hesperides. His future is already prophesized to be filled with victories ("Hercules and Antaeus"):

Hercules has the measure
of resistance and black powers
feeding off the territory. (Heaney, "Hercules and Antaeus" 5-7)

Hercules now needs to figure out how to defeat his opponent and his supernatural powers that allow him to gather his amazing strength from the earth. Hercules comes up with a plan because

he quickly catches on how Antaeus, who was born out of decomposing ground, recharges his energy:

Antaeus, the mould-hugger,
is weaned at last:
a fall was a renewal
but now he is raised up – (Heaney, "Hercules and Antaeus" 8-11)

Hercules realizes that Antaeus builds up his strength if he can touch and stay in connection with the ground. So, in order to defeat him, Hercules needs to find a way to separate him from the ground. He devises a plan: "the challenger's intelligence/ is a spur of light," (Heaney 12-13) to pin Antaeus "a blue prong graiping him" and keep him in the air, out of his element (Heaney 14-15). Antaeus is almost knocked down, and he cannot reach his restorative ground with all its accompanying powers he was used to since he was born:

and origins - the cradling dark
the river-veins, the secret gullies
of his strength,
the hatching grounds
of cave and souterrain, (Heaney 17-21)

Antaeus's farewell to the nature that made him and nourished him is like an elegy that takes up at least the fourth, fifth, and the beginning of sixth stanza, and in overall make almost one third of the entire poem. Even in his death, he is aware of his powers and his importance, so he knows that he is one of the legends that poets will lament about: "he has bequeathed it all / to elegists. Balor will die / and Byrthnoth and Sitting Bull" (Heaney 22-24).

The poet carefully chooses three legendary men who were killed because they stood up to their invaders and oppressors. Balor was the famous Irish one-eyed king whose eye killed anyone he looked upon; Byrthnoth was the eleventh century Anglo-Saxon earl killed by Vikings while he was defending his homeland, and Sitting Bull was the Sioux chieftain who led American Indian rebellions against the confiscation of tribal lands ("Hercules and Antaeus"). But, Hercules did not lose or die:

Hercules celebrates his victory:
Hercules lifts his arms

in a remorseless V,
his triumph unassailed
by the powers he has shaken. (Heaney 25-28)

The last four verses of the sixth stanza simply emphasize Hercules's victory as he celebrates his unassailed triumph over Antaeus by draining him of his power. Hercules even picks him up high, while Antaeus is still unconscious: "high as a profiled ridge, / a sleeping giant, / pap for the dispossessed" (Heaney 30-32), and the poet concludes that Antaeus is now just mush, soft food for infants, food for his underground relatives to feed on. Another death marks an ending of a myth and a legend. Heaney, again in his birthday speech, concludes:

> The import of the story about Hercules and Antaeus is complicated but potent. It tells us that we are made to live in at least two places at one time, in two domains that march each other. We should keep our feet on the ground to signify that nothing is beneath us, but we should also lift up our eyes to say nothing is beyond us. (qtd. in "Hercules and Antaeus").

Hercules can be perceived in this story as England, and Antaeus as Ireland. Heaney's ideal state is the one in which "contraries conflict productively, where Hercules and Antaeus wrestle athletically rather than murderously, where the Irish Protestant and Irish Catholic get along without foreign policing" (Hart, "History, Myth" 392). Heaney yet again demonstrates how his archaeological and philological quests for history, religion and myth are just a part of his humanistic attempt to promote dialogue between Ireland's warred factions (Hart, "History, Myth" 397).

4. Mythology and Religion of Andrew Hozier Byrne

Andrew John Hozier-Byrne was born on 17 March 1990 in Bray, County Wicklow, in Ireland. The date, symbolically, also marks a major Irish holiday – St. Patrick's Day. In his article "Hozier Biography," Steve Leggett provides details about Hozier's life. Hozier grew up in a family of artists: his mother is a painter, and his father used to be a blues musician. Hozier's music path begins when he joined his first band at the age of only 15. Genre-wise, he is

gravitating toward R&B, soul, gospel, and, of course, blues (Leggett). Hozier dropped out of Trinity College Dublin in his first year, and temporarily missed his chance to get a degree in music. What he did instead was: "record demos for Universal Music. From 2009 to 2012, he sang with Anúna, an Irish choral group, and toured internationally" (Leggett). Andrew Hozier Byrne can nowadays be described as a singer, songwriter, and multi-instrumentalist creating gospel-like and soulful indie-rock.

He released a solo EP *Take Me to Church* in 2013 using Hozier as his stage name. The video for this song directly addresses gay discrimination in the Catholic Church, and it instantly went viral on YouTube and Reddit (Leggett). Hozier gained worldwide attention due to imagery of religion and mythology carefully constructed in the lyrics he wrote for the song "Take Me to Church," but also huge recognition which resulted as Columbia released his eponymous debut album. Hozier is an artist who uses his stardom to release "revelatory music ever since, covering sensitive and often ignored topics such as addiction, domestic violence, religious trauma and LGBTQ+ rights" (Armstrong). These topics are present in all of the three albums he had released so far. Hozier's first original track of the next decade was the touching 2022 protest song "Swan Upon Leda," which later appeared on 2023 LP *Unreal Unearth* (Leggett). Hozier used this song to advocate for reproductive healthcare and fight for women's rights (Fargiano). He is often called the "Irish bard" which partly explains that he is a regional poet, just like Yeats, and Heaney, but he is also an amazing storyteller (Armstrong). Hozier's influence and voice imply an international level of recognition and stardom. He uses social media to provide content he feels is relevant, and to create art that he can share or publish just minutes after he produces them, as well as staying connected to his fans and people present on social media in general. And Hozier is never silent when it comes to human rights and freedom. Andrew Hozier Byrne is a true modern Irish man that actively fights for human rights and freedoms, and supports social causes in any way that he can. Irish comedienne Alison Spittle even wrote an article about street harassment and body shaming that women experience and titled it *Why Can't All Lads Be Sound Like Hozier?* and in an interview explained why she highlighted Hozier in particular:

> "I chose Hozier as my vessel for male Irish soundness because he embodies all the aspects of Irish masculinity that is good," she tells *The Irish Times.* "He's not brash but stands firmly up for what he believes. He uses his platform with the best of intentions. Years ago, when he sang on *Saturday Night Live*, I cheered for him like a football team." (Bruton)

Hozier possesses a distinct candour, and a skill to weave political and social messages with beautifully assembled lyrics and melodies that make Hozier's debut album one particularly worth exploring for this paper. His songs are full of references and allusions to religion and mythology, and are very rich in intertextuality. Hozier's poetic influences include James Joyce, William Butler Yeats, Seamus Heaney, Oscar Wilde, J.D. Salinger, T.S. Elliot, Samuel Beckett, Ovid, Flan O'Brien, Nina Simone, Leonard Cohen, Bob Dylan, Jim Morrison, Tom Waits, and many others (Turner). The foundation of his ideas is visible through his intertexts:

> These intertexts range broadly across the fields of Irish mythology, blues music, religion and literature, and a number of literary works in particular have helped him to develop his own voice as a storyteller in his songwriting. A close reading of his texts reveals that not only has his work been heavily influenced by Ireland's oral tradition of storytelling in both song and tale, but it has also been shaped by the fairy tales and themes of Irish mythology, and by the unique way in which Oscar Wilde and W. B. Yeats have approached these in their own writing. (Muiño 108)

If we consider Hozier's success of storytelling through his powerful music and compelling voice, as well as the fact that music is an essential part of everyday modern life, one can only conclude that Hozier has inevitably become "one of Ireland's new leading political voices in popular culture" (Muiño 107).

According to Muiño, "Arsonist's Lullaby" is a song that perfectly explains that universal and even mythical inner struggles one must face in their lives. People are often faced with the duality of good and evil in everyday lives through chaos and anarchy. Hozier's message through his song is not to forget who we are, and to remain being the ones in charge, regardless of the circumstances. The song "Arsonist's Lullaby," from his eponymous album, tells a story of growing up while struggling with repression and guilt by skilfully combining metaphors and symbolism with music that slowly cradles you into a fiery lullaby. Lullaby is usually a soothing song, often sung to children before going to sleep (111). That song should make one feel calm, at peace, and safe- safe enough to fall asleep, but this song is at the same time about struggles in different periods of a man's life. A struggle or a fight are by no means soothing and calming so this contrast is an amazing way to describe repression one might feel in an unwelcoming society that leads to suppressing your own needs, desires, and feelings.

This song could be easily connected with Yeats's "The Four Ages of Man" because of its structure and division of periods or ages that signify a battle. Hozier, however, divides his song

intro three ages: childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, with the reoccurring, very significant refrain. Each period of the protagonist's life presents a fight with his inner demons that are in the first stanza described as voices: "When I was a child, I heard voices / Some would sing and some would scream" (Hozier). Having in mind that Hozier is both a songwriter and a singer, having some of his inner voice or voices sing his thoughts or feelings is not unexpected, but if they scream, this might signify something that is perceived as negative. A screaming voice in one's head could be understood as a mental illness, or deeply suppressed emotion that is very important to the protagonist. Unfortunately, the poet explains what happens next: "You soon find you have few choices / I learn the voices died with me" (Hozier). The protagonist is obviously in a situation in which he realizes that his thoughts, needs, or feelings will not be well accepted by those surrounding him, and out of those few choices, he chooses to silence those voices. By silencing them, it is as if he had turned them off completely. It is clear that killing those voices inside of him was his only choice actually- his only choice to assimilate and survive in the society he lives in.

The second stanza describes a child's fascination with fire, something perceived as universally dangerous: "When I was a child, I'd sit for hours / Staring into open flame" (Hozier). This open flame, however, is a metaphor for a passion, or a temptation, a thrill, something that is not allowed, something that might be strictly forbidden and dangerous, something that is usually frowned upon. As children who are testing the limits of what they can or cannot do, without realizing an immediate danger of consequences, the protagonist as a child is very drawn to that metaphorical fire: "Something in it had a power / Could barely tear my eyes away" (Hozier). The poet here illustrates how hypnotizing that forbidden passion was, as well as the urge to succumb to it. Not being able to even look away suggests a spell-like trance that his connection to this forbidden fire invokes, and even seduces him. After the first two stanzas, the refrain appears the first time in the song:

All you have is your fire
And the place you need to reach
Don't you ever tame your demons
But always keep 'em on a leash (Hozier)

If a refrain is usually used in music to highlight the main idea and the message of the song, and it mostly appears three times withing the song, Hozier wisely chose his message (Chase). The poet's message is that the passion you have deep inside you is, ultimately, all you have in your

life. That passion and that fire will become a drive for many goals you need to achieve and you need to be persistent and determined. He goes so far as to call that specific passion and drive "demons."

There is an evident connection to mythology in referring to demons as this possible double, counterpart, or reflection of one's self. Yeats himself even believed that his own daimon was his alter-ego and his opposite that provided him with a unique perspective of an unknown life and feelings he would have never felt if he did not allow it to himself (Harper 158). Having those demons as a part of yourself is an essential part of your being, so you should never ignore them or turn them off. This mythological duality and contrast is beyond inevitable. It is crucial to basically know how to use that passion, and by keeping it on a leash, how to control it. Control is the key to overall success in the struggles that are ahead of you.

The fourth stanza marks the age of adolescence which is always a confusing time for a young man or a woman. One's body is changing; one is maturing, and new feelings appear, which leave many people feeling overwhelmed. This state is exactly what the poet describes: "When I was 16, my senses fooled me / Thought gasoline was on my clothes" (Hozier). The sensory overload may even induce a meltdown because adolescence is, to most, an unstable period of their young lives. The poet here illustrates that confusion and chaos in which he is no longer certain of anything. Strong emotions can easily cloud one's judgement, and make them wonder off the road they wanted to take. But those teenage emotions and battles did not drive him away from his true self: "I knew that something would always rule me / I knew the scent was mine alone" (Hozier). The protagonist, the arsonist, keeps his fire and moves on to the next stage of his life: adulthood.

In the first and the second verse of the sixth stanza the poet confesses that he had hoped that these internal struggles ended when love was introduced in his life. His approach to love is not simplistic or naïve. The poet, the protagonist, the arsonist, understands that love is not one simple happy feeling: "When I was a man I thought it ended / When I knew love's perfect ache" (Hozier). He refers to love and everything he understands love is as a mixture of love and pain. The poet demonstrates deep understanding of complex feelings, but still idealizes love because he wanted love to solve all his struggles and fights in one blow. He then recalls that everything always was and is in his own hands, and under his own control: "But my peace has always depended / On all the ashes in my wake" (Hozier). Whatever happened in the past, he is now at peace with it. He can accept who he was, who he is, and who he is becoming while always

being in control of his own demons. Knowing who you are in this world, what your role is, and how to use your mind and your feelings is of the utmost importance for a human being. If you are a talented artist, knowing yourself truly is indispensable, and your struggles are the essential part of your art. This is how you know you exist.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to indicate that specific motifs, allusions, and references to mythology and religion used in the selected poems of William Butler Yeats, Seamus Heaney, and Andrew Hozier Byrne highlight their identities as Irish poets and artists worldwide, but that their message is universal. The paper provides an overview of Irish mythology and religion, and places the poets in literary periods of Modernism and Postmodernism.

William Butler Yeats uses Irish mythology and religion to show the love and passion he shared for his country. He made extensive efforts to collect Irish folklore in order to help with the Irish Renaissance. In his poem "The Four Ages of Man" he exemplifies epic struggles one needs to go through to even try to become a decent human being, and that struggle is universal. "The Second Coming" is an apocalypse poem that can serve as a warning because it contains criticism involving Catholicism, and the inevitable negative changes in the world.

Heaney generally used both Irish and classical mythology, and Catholicism to testify to the atrocities committed in his Northern Ireland, and to appeal for a world with no violence and death that speaks only the truth. This paper attempted to show that his poem "Hercules and Antaeus" serves as a parable of perception, in which he illustrates that it takes a lot more than just strength, love, and connection to your country – one also needs to be wise. In Heaney's vision, this is hope for a peaceful world.

Andrew Hozier Byrne uses mythology and religion to fight for basic human rights and freedoms by contemporizing the traditional motifs from Irish poetry to make a point relevant for his twenty-first century audiences. "Arsonist's Lullaby," a song from the album *Hozier*, tells the story of the oppression of the society and a struggle with your inner demons. It shows the universal and constant struggle one needs to endure if one wants to be in charge of their own life and future. One needs to learn how to control his demons to succeed in his goals.

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