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The Use of The Mask in Yeats's Poetry

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Abstract

This paper aims to identify the use of the mask in Yeats's poetry shedding light on three poems written in the period (1910-1933). The researcher uses the literary analysis methodology to achieve the objective of the paper. The paper consists of three sections; the first gives an introduction and summarizes the poetic changes through the poet's life, especially the social and political effects upon his psychology and literary works. The second discusses the use of the mask or anti-self-technique in the latest poems of Yeats and summons up the mask and some historical views about it. The third section concludes several points including that the mask technique is a part of the poet's life due to his psychological state of mind and how it affects his matured poetic life.

Key Words: Anti-self, Persona, Politics, Rhymers, Style.

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استخدام القناع في شعر بيتس

علي عاصي حسين

كلية التربية البدنية وعلوم الرياضة / جامعة تكريت

المستخلص

تهدف الدراسة إلى تحديد استخدام القناع في شعر بيتس، من خلال إلقاء الضوء على ثلاث قصائد كتبت في الفترة ما بين (1910-1933). استخدم الباحث منهج التحليل الأدبي لتحقيق هدف الدراسة. يتكون البحث من ثلاثة أقسام؛ يحتوي الأول على مقدمة ويلخص التغييرات الشعرية عبر حياة الشاعر، خاصة التأثيرات الاجتماعية والسياسية على نفسيته وأعماله الأدبية. بينما يناقش القسم الثاني استخدام تقنية القناع أو ما يسمى بتقنية الذات - المعاكسة في أحدث قصائد بيتس يستعرض فيه القناع وبعض الآراء التاريخية حوله. وختم القسم الثالث بعدة نقاط منها أن تقنية القناع هي جزء من حياة الشاعر نظرًا لحالته النفسية وكيف تؤثر على حياته الشعرية المتقدمة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الذات - المعاكسة، الشخصية، السياسة، الرومنسية، الأسلوب.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 W.B Yeats's life

W.B. Yeats was born in Dublin on 13th of June 1865 at "Guerneville" in Sandy Mount of a middle-class family, William was too difficult to be taught, so he went with his sister to be taught spelling and grammar by an old gentle woman in the early years of his childhood. Yeats went to school in England for the first time at ten years of age. Despite the toughness of his education Yeats started writing poetry at an early age when he wrote his first poem "the song of the fairy" when he was only nineteen years of age. This poem was published in Dublin university review in 1885. The difference between Yeats life in Ireland and his new life in England effected very forcibly upon him and his poetry. He had to live with two concepts: companionship and enmity; both contribute to his sense of unusuality of being. Yeats passed away on the age of seventy-three in France in 1939. (Jeffer, 1966).

1.2 Yeats the Poet:

Yeats started writing poetry with pre-Raphaelite mechanism where he started learning the art of picturesque description that made his style in the early poems. Then, he found

mysticism as a refuge from the modern world and its spiritual barrenness. Yeats found the shelter to hide from materialism of the modern age, through hiding behind his artistic works (Rajimwale, 2012). The participation of Yeats in the Irish political system had a strong effect in his interest in Irish myths and folklore. Church doctrine and British control over the school system suppressed Irish myths and folklore. Yeats used his poetry as a strategy to develop Irish nationalism, he retold entire folklores in epic poems and plays such as "The Wandering of Oisín" (1889) and "The Death of Cuchulainn" (1939); other poems, such as "Who Goes with Fergus?", deal with folklore-related subjects, images, and themes. (1839) Yeats imagined a meeting with the exiled wandering king of Irish legend, while "The Song of Wandering Aegus" (1899) described the experiences of the lovelorn god Aegus as he searches for the beautiful maiden seen in his dreams. The most important thing about Yeats' poetry is that it is rich in Irish culture. Yeats frequently borrowed word selection, verse form, and patterns of imagery directly from traditional Irish myths and folklore. (Yeats W. , 2012)

1.3 Yeats's style

Yeats's style of writing poetry had changed from time to time and from one volume to another, at the first phase of his poetry he wrote in a language often romantic and haunting in what concerned with the Irish legends and folklore, in the later works he wanted to make his language more natural and simpler and draw on everyday conversations. William wanted to ensure a wide circulation for his sometimes-complicated theories. He used tones which are related to the kind of language he uses. The dramatic tones appeared in many of his poems like "Adam's Curse" and "Beggar to Beggar Cried". Concerning other types of his style, Yeats used linguistic patterns to reinforce his message through his poems. He also used refrains and functional repetitions in his poetry and metrical patterns played a significant role in patterning his verse (Thorne, 2006).

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 Anti-Self History in the poet's Career:

Yeats had the membership of the rhymers' club in 1891, his artistic works and career became an attempt to escape from materialism and to find his desirable spirituality. The increasing realism of the period of 1910 is clearly seen in his "The Green Helmet and Other Poems" which took a more personal view (Mohammed, 2018).

The peak of William's achievement is reached in "The Tower" published in 1928 in which he managed to use the philosophical themes with a great deal of professionalism, in poems within this collection, Yeats's philosophy was hidden beneath a mask of childlike simplicity (W.R.Goodman, 2012).

“Yeats’s middle years were characterized by an absorption in mask and persona,” (Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature, 1995). During Yeats' middle years, his artistic endeavors were distinguished by a deep immersion in the themes of "mask and persona." This period saw a deliberate exploration of different identities, indicating a strong interest in the multifaceted nature of human existence. Yeats appeared to favor a symbolic and metaphorical approach, employing masks as tools to convey a complex tapestry of emotions and societal reflection. The term "absorption" connotes a deep and intense involvement, referring to a pivotal moment in Yeats' career when he delves into the complexities of identity, demonstrating a nuanced understanding of the human psyche.

There must be ‘a crisis that joins that buried self for certain moments to the trivial daily mind’”. In this moving line, Yeats expresses the concept of a transformative crisis, which temporarily connects the hidden aspects of one's inner self with the routine thoughts of everyday life. It alludes to a profound intersection where the profound and the mundane meet, revealing hidden layers of personal consciousness. Yeats appears to suggest that such crises act as catalysts, temporarily revealing the deeper, perhaps overlooked, dimensions of our identity, thereby bridging the profound and the ordinary in moments of self-discovery and reflection.

“A person could oppose the tyranny of his fated self or Mask by consciously assuming a Mask or Masks that were the opposite of all that he was” (Kuch, 47). Kuch's thought-provoking statement suggests that individuals can resist the oppressive influence of their predetermined selves or societal masks. People can actively challenge and confront the expectations placed on them by deliberately wearing masks that are diametrically opposed to their true nature. This idea implies a deliberate act of self-transformation, allowing people to redefine their identities and break free from the constraints imposed by societal roles or predetermined destinies. Kuch's insight suggests a dynamic relationship between the self and external expectations, emphasizing the possibility of conscious rebellion and self-reinvention through the strategic use of contrasting masks.

Yeats' use of the mask in his poetry can be viewed as a sophisticated literary device that allowed him to navigate the intersection of personal and political dimensions. In the early stages of his career, as exemplified by poems such as "The Fisherman," Yeats openly embraced his Irish identity and nationalist sentiments, portraying a traditional Irish lifestyle. However, the course of his life and the changing political landscape forced him to keep revolutionary ideas hidden until his appointment as a senator in 1922. The metaphorical use of masks in Yeats' poetry emerges as a way to navigate the complexities of his personal and political identity. Yeats uses the mask to selectively reveal or obscure aspects of his convictions, allowing him to address Irish themes, politics, and historical events with nuance. For example, in "An Irish Air Foresees His Death," he uses the mask to expose the hypocrisy of Britain's involvement in Irish affairs during WWI. Poems like

"Easter 1916" and "In Memory Of Eva Gore Booth And Con Markiewicz" reveal a more explicit engagement with Irish nationalist politics, demonstrating how Yeats strategically uses the mask to convey his evolving perspectives on the political landscape. Even in poems such as "The Second Coming" and "Leda and The Swan," where the emphasis is not overtly political, the underlying theme of Irish nationalism is subtly woven into the fabric of his poetry. Yeats's expert use of the mask as a literary device serves as a window into the intricate dance between his personal convictions and the sociopolitical context of his time. (Richard Kearny, 1985)

2.2 Yeats and The Mask:

The first use of the mask was in Hall's Chronicles in 1512 where the mask used to hide the dancing figures' faces (Cudden, 1998).

The term "mask" comes from the Renaissance Italian word "masque," which flourished in England during the reigns of Elisabeth I, James I, and Charles I. In its full development, it was an elaborate form of court entertainment in the early 17th century, combining poetic drama, music, songs, dance, magnificent costuming, and stage spectacle. In England, they use the first artistic talents of the time, such as Ben Johnson, for his poetic script "The Masque of the Blackness and The Masque of the Queen."

The term persona, mask, or "masque" refers to the tendency to think of narrative and lyrical works of literature as modes of speech, like Yeats' use of the term in his "A Coat" or, as the now-favored term, as discourse. To consider a work to be an utterance implies that there is a speaker with specific personal characteristics who expresses attitudes toward both the characters and materials in the work, as well as the reader to whom the work is addressed.

Specific applications of the term "Persona" involved difficult concepts in philosophy and social psychology concepts such as "The self" and "Personal Identity" which Yeats focused on this conception in his poems to make a better self than his real one using mysticism and spiritual issues and including them in his poetry (Abram's, 1999).

Yeats in much of his poetry talked about himself, after his marriage 1917 to Georgia Hyde-Lees, the most important topic in his poetry became the quest for self-knowledge. Yeats poetry involves trying on a variety of roles or masks to forge a 'self with which he could be happy. The great struggle of his life was to come to understand him. His poetry includes Nature\Art, Youth\Old age, Body\Soul, Animal\Man, Anarchy\ Order, Change Stasis and Existence\Essence. He theories that even human is born with a specific personality, the reason behind his unhappiness is that personality because it is never complete unto self. As Yeats believed, for happiness to be achieved one must struggle to unite oneself with one's "Anti- self" by adopting various masks or personas (Thorne, 2006)

The term "persona" was originally used to refer to the acting masks used in classical Greek theatre, and it has since developed extensive critical connections. It has been widely used to distinguish between the person who sits down to write, and the "author" as manifested through the words on the page. Even in first-person narration, the author's persona, or second self, must be distinguished from the narrator. The degree of correspondence between the narrator and the persona may vary. This concept of persona as a second self-incorporates the metaphorical roots of the "mask" concepts that Yeats used in his poems like: *Ego Dominos Tuus*, *A Coat*, *Dialogue Between Self and Soul*, and other poems. The mask concept implies the total being presented to the reader, outside and beyond the writer who assumed it. In magic, the mask-based ritual in which the "Mask" is an independent being that possesses the individual. Mask is a concept that implies that the writer of poetry, for example, discovered a more fully integrated vision for himself than what exists; it also implies a way out of the closed world of the ego into an objective vision communicable to others. Yeats employs the mask concept to express his desire for an art that allows him to objectify his personal experience and liberate himself from mere subjectivity. (Peter Childs, 1973).

2.3 The Use of Persona in Yeats's Poetry:

Persona used by Yeats in his writings in the beginning of the twentieth century, he used it as social front and a defending method to protect himself from the world. Starting from the 1916's, Yeats started to be convinced with the immortality of soul as he was a man of myths, magic, and fairies, he finally gives up those beliefs. Then Yeats saw in human being "dual – personality" made up of self and anti-self. Self is made from nature and by man's social training, and anti-self-made of the struggle against self. To find freedom from the world of materialism to the world of spirituality. (W.R.Goodman, 2012)

It is obvious that the modern man used the mask as lifestyle in the twentieth century in many aspects of life and that took place after believing in the idea of insecurity of life and psychological instability especially with the hast changes in one's life. Yeats wore the mask on many occasions to protect himself from the surrounding circumstances, that can be seen in his political life and point of views and in his movement from his hometown to study in England and the changes that he experienced while growing up, which shaped a personality with unusual ideas and way of thinking.

Many of Yeats's poems are derived from his own experience and many of his poems were written very much in the vein of the romantics' conception which views poetry as a written in the language of ordinary men. The use of the persona is clear in his poems, in many descriptions persona defined as the mask or the character or even the role that man wears or goes in and then it described as the mask worn by the writer of the poems in their writings or books.

Yeats' poetry of personal utterance avoids personalized subjectivity by making use of the concepts of self and anti-self. He adopts persona to prevent "Accident" in his personal life from distraction. He parades relatives, friends, writers, public figures, legendary heroes, and occultists throughout his works because they embodied values that closely reflected his own. Yeats defined the mask as the opposite of self; the mask theory explains the personality mechanism in a vision-astrological wheel, Gyres, and recycled time as well as his accomplished lyrics. Gyres theory refers to a complex vision in which the physical world is paralleled by an active spiritual one that has influenced human life and is the source of the underlying pattern in modern chaos. (Schrikcer, 1982).

Yeats, using this theory presented his ideas diagrammatically as two interlocking cones that he called gyres. According to his theory the spiritual and Physical world are interlocked and each one of them has its own effect on the other in a varying degree. For the poet they are arranged to represent something logical like: Sun\Moon, Spiritual\Physical, Emotions\Facts, Artist\Moral man and Objective\Subjective, these elements and life system allowed Yeats to find pattern underlying everything. His usage of the mask 'Persona' allowed him to put his personal material into more public from using character to be represented rather than his own character. He began to use and experience the mask between 1900 and 1910 and it functioned on several levels: social front, defense against the world or a heroic figure. Yeats tried to portrait his own life in the way he wishes through his poems using the mask technique (Morton).

2.4 Yeats's Usage of The Mask Technique

2.4.1 *A Coat*

I MADE my song a coat
Covered with embroideries
Out of old mythologies
From heel to throat;
But the fools caught it,
Wore it in the world's eyes
As though they'd wrought it.
Song, let them take it,
For there's more enterprise
In walking naked.

This poem was written in 1912, and it begins with the poet himself speaking directly, delicately, about his song, poetry, and overall art. He tells us about something that bothers him or has hurt him. We can find here a poet who is completely committed to his first love. Through a beautiful melody that is a children's song, we will find the poet who is proud of his origins, nature, and human condition; he appears to us as the one who defends his way of thinking against those who are skeptical and cowardly. He believes he is a fighter, a hero, a seeker, and a discoverer of some truth of his own.

Yeats tries to explain that after he expressed himself publicly and came out to light, someone tried to snatch the poet's ideas, or perhaps his own opinions were not shared and well respected by others, and it appears that he has been mocked and, more importantly, he has not been recognized, as if he was living in a non-free speech society.

"A Coat" is a unique poem that expresses Yeats' use of artistic works to cover himself, here he is discussing the idea of have the courage to be exposed not only covered both at the same time in the same poem and that shows the concept of self and anti-self and a discussion between both. Yeats tried to take off the mask that he is covering behind because he found it interesting to reveal himself in front of a society that copied his ideas and tools and stole his own thought and covered themselves with.

On the one hand, the poem addresses the issue of honor and dignity, as well as the expression of genuine feelings and thoughts from the heart. This means fighting for an ideal and having a strong belief in something. On the other hand, there are some reminiscences about treason, a lack of consideration, and the stealing of ideas from cowardly people who do not dare to stand in front of the world and defend their ideals. In this final Scene, the poet is telling us that after expressing himself publicly, either through poetry or speech, he was frustrated because he was attacked, stabbed in the back by someone who did not respect him. All these thoughts forced Yeats to be convinced to walk without the mask "works of art" for the sake of not being judged by his own literature or he might be misunderstood by others if he kept using his literature as a cover.

Yeats has created an important symbolism that is clear throughout the poem. If we analyze the poem through the literal verses, we can stop at the first one and say that it is funny how the author looks at his own work, his poetry, or this very poem; whatever it is, he calls it "song" (line one); in that way, "song" would represent all his ideas., his poetry, his entire way of thinking expressed through words, while "coat" (line one) would be someone's identity, In this case, it would be the poet's one thing that covers himself and provides him with security and a place to live, This coat is also covered with beautiful "embroideries" (line two), which he tells us are made from "old mythologies from heel to throat."(line three), or in other words, made from the history of his country, but he Found the oppressors caught it in an opportunist moment and left him apart Tom the world, Without admitting who the success owner of the "song" was, they were the successful

ones. Yeats confronts his creation, his only thought, and speaks to it as if it were an animated thing: "Song, let them take it/ OE here's more enterprise / in walking naked," he feels he has a clear conscience and, as he talks to his "song," he is talking to himself. He is telling him that it does not matter what happens if he is at peace and has a clear conscience of himself, free of sin. In this way, he achieves spiritual peace with himself, and thus he is a hero. (Patricia, 1971).

2.4.2 *The Mask*

PUT off that mask of burning gold

With emerald eyes.

O no, my dear, you make so bold

To find if hearts be wild and wise,

And yet not cold.

I would but find what's there to find,

Love or deceit.

It was the mask engaged your mind,

And after set your heart to beat,

Not what's behind.

But lest you are my enemy,

I must enquire.

O no, my dear, let all that be;

What matter, so there is but fire

In you, in me?

The poem was written in the 20th century and was first published in 1910 in a collection called "The Green Helmet and Other Poems". This collection and specifically this poem discussed love, identity and mysticism themes, the mask is a poem where Yeats addressed a person with a metaphorical mask in, giving him a command to put off the mask he is

wearing and that was for the purpose of revealing the real feelings and stop hiding behind that fake identity.

The use of the mask technique here is to explore the tension between appearances and true emotions of people despite the glowing shapes of their masks. Still that mask makes a barrier between two lovers who are on fire and they both know that fact, but they cannot reveal their real emotions due to that barrier.

Yeats went through relationships, love, and an emotional combination of thoughts of enmity and peace, it shows the desire to uncover the real feelings beneath the surfaces.

2.4.3 Ego Dominus Tuus Poem

Ego Dominus Tuus

Hic. On the grey sand beside the shallow stream
under your old wind-beaten tower, where still
a lamp burns beside the open book.

That Michael Roberts left, you walk in the moon,
and, though you have passed the best of life, still trace,
Enthralled by the unconquerable delusion,
Magical shapes.

I will. By the help of an image
I call my own opposite, summon all.
that I have handled least, least looked upon.
Hic. And I would find myself and not an image.
I'll. That is our modern hope, and by its light.
We have lit upon the gentle, sensitive mind.
And lost the old nonchalance of the hand.
Whether we have chosen chisel, pen, or brush,
We are but critics, or but half create,
Timid, entangled, empty and abashed,

Lacking the countenance of our friends.

Hic. And yet

the chief imagination of Christendom,

Dante Alighieri, so utterly found himself.

that he has made that hollow face of his

plainer to the mind's eye than any face

but that of Christ.

I'll. And did he find himself?

Or was the hunger that had made it hollow?

a hunger for the apple on the bough

most out of reach? and is that spectral image.

The man that Lapo and that Guido knew.

I think he fashioned tom his opposite.

An image that might have been a stony face.

Staring upon a Bedouin's horse-hair roof

from doored and windowed cliff, or half upturned.

Among the coarse grass and the camel-dung.

He set his chisel to the hardest stone.

Being mocked by Guido for his lecherous life,

Derided and deriding, driven out.

To climb that stair and eat that bitter bread,

He found the unpersuadable justice, he found.

The most exalted lady loved by a man,

Hic. Yet surely there are men who have made their art.

Out of no tragic war, lovers of life,

Impulsive men that look for happiness
And sing when they have found it.
I'll. No, not sing,
For those that love the world serve it in action,
Grow rich, popular, and full of influence,
And should they paint or write, still it is action:
The struggle of the fly in marmalade.
The rhetorician would deceive his neighbors,
The sentimentalist himself; while art
Is but a vision of reality.
What portion in the world can the artist have?
Who has awakened from the common dream?
But dissipation and despair?
Hic. And yet
No one denies to Keats love of the world.
Remember his deliberate happiness.
I'll. His art is happy, but who knows his mind?
I see a schoolboy when I think of him,
With face and nose pressed to a sweet-shop window,
For certainly he sank into his grave
His senses and his heart unsatisfied,
And made -- being poor, ailing, and ignorant,
Shut out from all the luxury of the world,
The coarse-bred son of a livery-stable keeper --
Luxuriant song.

Hic. Why should you leave the lamp?

Burning alone beside an open book,

And trace these characters upon the sands?

A style is found by sedentary toil.

And by the imitation of great masters.

Zlle. Because I seek an image, not a book.

Those men that in their writings are most wise,

Own nothing but their blind, stupefied hearts.

I call the mysterious one who yet.

Shall walk the wet sands by the edge of the stream.

And look most like me, being indeed my double,

And prove of all imaginable things.

The most unlike, being my anti-self,

And, standing by these characters, disclose

All that I seek; and whisper it as though.

He was afraid the birds, who cry aloud

Their momentary cries before it is dawn,

Would carry it away to blasphemous men.

This poem was written and published in 1918 in the book of *Per A mica silentia lunae*, where this poem introduced with a collection of Yeats's essays many other poems under the title of *wild swans and cool* 1919. The words "Ego Dominos Tuus" were spoken to Dante in a dream by the personification of love the names of the two characters of the poem 'Hic' and 'ille' are Latin words mean this man and that man (Morton).

The title of W.B. Yeats' poem "Ego Dominos Tuus" came from Dante's epic "I am Your Master." The poem dealt with the artist's social role, and it summarized the conflict between the self and anti-self, as well as the perfection of one's life and the perfection of one's work.

In this poem, Yeats paints a picture of a mysterious one, describes the loss of artistic vitality in the world, and resolves that he will reject the style found by imitating the expert, because his artistic revelation will only come through his antithesis.

The poem clearly conveys the distinction between Yeats' public and private selves. The poet is coming to terms with himself as the artist becomes one with the artefact, like Dante, who came from the anti-self and indulged in sensual pleasure in his daily life. Yeats imitates Dante by wearing a mask to write his poetry. He puts on the mask, which represents the "opposite of everything that I am in my daily life."

The mask depicts the soldier, fisherman, fulfilled lover, horseman, scholar, and hermit. All these images will reveal what Yeats seeks in his poetry without detracting from his own identity.

3. CONCLUSION

The metaphorical mask, a recurring motif in Yeats' poetry, serves as a lens through which he expresses his personal views on various aspects of life. In some cases, the poet criticizes the use of this mask, claiming that it conceals the truth of genuine feelings. Yet, paradoxically, at other times, Yeats uses the mask as a shield, protecting himself from outside criticism. This duality emphasizes the intricate interplay between authenticity and societal expectations in his works.

In "A Coat" and "The Mask," two moving poems about societal imitation and the conflict between false emotions and true love, Yeats considers how these themes have influenced his own life. His critique of society's proclivity to imitate and conform is unequivocal, emphasizing the impact of such conformity on personal authenticity. At the same time, the study of fake emotions versus genuine love provides a nuanced perspective on the complexities of human relationships. These themes, which are deeply rooted in Yeats' personal experiences, contribute to a complex portrait of his evolving life.

For Yeats, the metaphorical mask is a necessary tool for enriching modern literature with a realistic depiction of life. His poems reflect the modern man's mentality, depicting the individual's efforts to protect themselves from the uncertainties of life. The depiction of life as a "bundle of accident and incoherence" that one faces daily reflects Yeats' desire for readers to discover a complete poetics in his poetry, which is infused with Irish and personal mythology.

To fully understand Yeats's poetry, one must follow his literary journey chronologically. His extensive use of Irish myths and folklore distinguishes him from his English counterparts, as he seeks to explore Ireland's rich and imaginative history. Yeats' deliberate departure demonstrates his dedication to expressing distinct cultural narratives, emphasizing that Ireland's history contains as many imaginative events as classical Greek traditions.

Yeats's critique includes imitators of the early romantics, as expressed in the poem "A Coat." His poetic techniques, which include the prominent use of the mask or "persona," demonstrate his belief that wearing a specific mask allows a poet to communicate thoughts in a universal and meaningful way. The deliberate masking of personal subjectivity makes the individual experience more universally relatable.

Yeats's living works reveal a connection between the world of reality and the spiritual realm. The arts become his refuge, a barrier that protects him from the harsh realities of the outside world. This tendency to hide behind his creations becomes a recurring theme, representing Yeats's desire to escape an uninteresting world and find solace in the imaginative and spiritual dimensions of his own artistic realm.

This examination of Yeats's complex use of the metaphorical mask reflects a broader trend among writers and artists. The researcher claims that literary works frequently act as a protective veil, allowing creators to express their ideas, thoughts, emotions, and political beliefs. However, this protective shield comes at a cost: writers and artists must bear the weight of societal expectations, leaving them open to criticism and potential misunderstandings. This realization completes the thematic circle by tying together the intricate interplay of masks, authenticity, and literature's role as a haven for expression and safety.

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