

**Geographic Imagination and Utopian Places In the Poetry of
W.B. Yeats:**

A Geocritical Study of Ireland and Byzantium

م.م. رشيد برهان رشيد

Asst.Lect. Rashid Burhan Rashid

جامعة كربلاء – كلية التربية للعلوم الانسانية – قسم اللغة الانكليزية

Rasheed.b@uokerbala.edu.iq

الكلمات المفتاحية: النقد الجغرافي؛ برتراند ويستفال؛ الجغرافيا الخيالية؛ الفضاء
المثالي؛ الزمانية المكانية؛ التجاوزية؛ بيزنطة؛ الحداثة الأدبية؛ النظرية المكانية

**Keywords: Geocriticism; Bertrand Westphal; Imaginary
Geography; Utopian Space; Spatio-Temporality;
Transgressivity; Byzantium; Literary Modernism; Spatial
Theory.**

الملخص

تستخدم هذه الدراسة النموذج الجيو نقدي الذي وضعه برتراند ويستفال لدراسة المخيلة الشعرية لدى ويليام بتلر ، بهدف توضيح كيفية تشكّل الجغرافيا الأيرلندية والجغرافيا البيزنطية، (1865-1939) بيتس ، وكيفية المقارنة بينهما، والأهم من ذلك، الكشف عن العلاقة الجدلية التي تربطهما عبر فضاءاته (Spatio-temporality) التخيلية. وانطلاقاً من مفاهيم الجيو-نقد الأساسية، مثل الزمان والمكان ، تحلل (Referentiality) والمرجعية (Transgressivity)، والتجاوزية (temporality) ، تيه (1890) جزيرة بحيرة إنيسفري « الدراسة مجموعة مختارة من قصائد بيتس، وهي و بيزنطة (1932) جانب كتابه النظري (1928) ، و الإبحار إلى بيزنطة (1897) أينغوس بإصداريه (1937/1925). وتهدف الدراسة إلى البرهنة على أن المخيلة (A Vision) رؤية ، الجغرافية لدى بيتس تمثل خريطة أيديولوجية معقدة، حيث تصوّر أيرلندا بوصفها مكان ؛ أي فضاءً تتداخل فيه الأعماق الأسطورية مع الصراعات التاريخية، (Palimpsest) وزمانيا ويجسد في الوقت نفسه الطبيعة الزائلة للتجربة الإنسانية. أما بيزنطة فتبنى بوصفها مكاناً مضاداً يتميز بالخلود الجمالي، والتسامي الروحي، والتحرر (Counter-place) (Utopian) طوباويا المقصود من جميع القيود البيولوجية والزمنية. وبدلاً من النظر إلى هذين المكانين بوصفهما ثنائية متقابلة بسيطة، تُظهر الدراسة العلاقة الجدلية التي تجمعهما، إذ إن الرغبة إلى بيزنطيا لا يمكن فصله عن تعلق الشاعر العميق بالعالم الذي يسعى إلى تجاوزه. ومن خلال اتخاذ المخيلة المكانية لدى بيتس دراسة تطبيقية في إطار النظرية الجيو نقدية المعاصرة، تقدم هذه الدراسة منهجية جديدة لدارسي بيتس ، وتوسع من تطبيق الجيو نقد على الشعر الحدائثي، كما تساهم في إثراء النقاشات النقدية المتعلقة بالأدب بوصفه فضاءً، والفكر الطوباوي، والدلالات الأيديولوجية للجغرافيا المتخيلة

Abstract

This paper utilizes Bertrand Westphal's geocritical model for studying the poetic imagination of W.B. Yeats (1865-1939) to describe how an Irish geography and a Byzantine geography were formed, contrasted, and, most importantly, connected dialectically through his imaginative spaces. Using geocritical concepts such as spatio-temporality, transgressivity, and referentiality as a foundation, I analyze a body of selected works of Yeats' poetry — "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" (1890); "The Wandering of Aengus" (1897); "Sailing to Byzantium" (1928); "Byzantium" (1932); along with the theoretical writings of A Vision (1925/37) — to argue that Yeats' geographic imagination is a complicated ideological map in which Ireland serves as a spatio-temporal palimpsest a space filled with both mythical depth and historical contention, along with the embodied temporariness of the human experience while



Byzantium is created as a utopian counter-place characterized by aesthetic timelessness, spiritual transcendence, and the intentional removal of all biologic and temporal contingencies. Rather than viewing these two places as simple binary oppositions, I demonstrate their dialectical relationship: the desire for Byzantium can never be disassociated from the poet's deep affection for the world he wishes to transcend. Through using Yeats' spatial imagination as a case study in current geocritical theory, I provide a new methodology for Yeats scholars; extend the use of geocriticism to modernist poetry; and contribute to larger critical discussions about literature as space, utopian thinking, and the ideological implications of imaginative geography.

Introduction

William Butler Yeats (1865–1939) represents an unusual location in the history of literary modernism due to both the depth and systemic nature of his spatial vision. For over fifty years throughout his writing career, Yeats continually revisited the same few locations which were loaded with both mythical/philosophical/aesthetic value i.e., the lakes and hills of County Sligo, the tower at Thoor Ballylee—and especially the fictionalized city of Byzantium. He invested these places with multiple levels of significance so that they went beyond being simply a setting, but instead became "imaginary geographies" (a term I will define below), which represent place beyond its original/historical reference points, and serve as vehicles for exploring some of the major concerns of his work.

The literature reviewing Yeats's spatial imagination includes reviews based upon mythology, post-colonialism and historicism (Cullingford, 1993; Kiberd, 1995; Lloyd, 1993). However, none have engaged with the conceptual foundations of current theories regarding space and, specifically, the geocritical paradigm developed by Westphal (2011) in *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*. This paper aims to fill this gap.



Literary studies have been changed dramatically as a result of the "spatial turn" in both the humanities and social sciences. This shift was made possible through the work of Lefebvre (1991) with his theory of the social production of space, which challenged an understanding of space as being a neutral entity for human activity; Soja (1996) continued this thought process with his call for a postmodern geography focused on the political and ideological aspects of spatial experience. As a result of these two thinkers' ideas, there is now a large and diverse body of research that combines literary studies, cultural geography, and spatial theory. At the forefront of the larger body of literature based on the idea of the "spatial turn," Westphal's (2011) geocriticism provides the most complete and systematic application of the theories from spatial theory into an evaluation of how literary works are analyzed. Geocriticism provides Westphal with three central concepts to understand how to analyze literature from a spatial perspective including spatio-temporality, transgressivity, and referentiality. These three concepts will allow Westphal to evaluate Yeats' poetry using all aspects of geographical space: real, mythical, and politically charged.

The two imagined geographic landscapes central to this research are Ireland and Byzantium. They symbolize the two extremes of Yeats' imaginative geographical and philosophical horizons. Ireland can be envisioned through the lens of Yeats' poetry as a land of Celtic legend, a geographically disputed area that embodies both the colonizer's dispossessed people and their nation-state aspirations. In addition, Ireland serves as the birthplace of all things biological and the source of temporal transience that the aging poet wishes to leave behind. Conversely, Byzantium is an imaginative geography created by Yeats through his readings on Byzantine art and theology, the images at Ravenna and the development of an overarching philosophical framework for *A Vision* (Yeats, 1937). It is the exact opposite of what Ireland is or represents because it embodies timelessness, transcendence, and non-political existence.

In order to provide a comprehensive study of Yeats' engagement with the two imaginative geographical spaces represented by "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" (1890), "The Wandering of Aengus" (1897), "Sailing to Byzantium" (1928), and "Byzantium" (1932) this article uses the entire poetic corpus as well as all parts of *A Vision* (Yeats, 1937) and *Essays and Introductions* (Yeats, 1990).



This article will proceed in the following manner. In section 2 it will review the appropriate scholarly literature. In section 3 it will outline both a theoretical and practical basis for the article. It will then present an analysis and discussion of the data in section 4. Finally, section 5 will contain conclusions about the findings; articulate how the results contribute to the academic community; acknowledge the constraints of the study; and propose potential avenues for future studies.

Literature Review

The critical study of Yeats' connection with geographical space can be traced back to early generations of scholars; however, they generally addressed this issue using either mythological or biographical instead of explicit spatial frames of reference. Ellman's (1948) study "Yeats: The Man and the Masks" was one of the first significant contributions toward establishing a basic understanding regarding Yeats' imaginative geography and his creation of an artistic identity. The landscapes of Sligo, the tower and the symbolic East were used by Ellman as examples which illustrate Yeats' use of landscape as part of a larger self-fashioned image of himself. Vendler's (1963) study titled Yeats's "Vision" and the Later Plays showed the deliberate nature of Yeats' spatial symbols. This study also illustrated how A Vision (Yeats, 1937) provided a theoretical foundation for many of the spatial opposites that characterize Yeats' later works. Kermode's (1957) study titled "The Romantic Image," placed the Byzantium Poems within the larger context of aesthetic idealism. He identified what he called the "deliberate archaism" of Yeats' use of Byzantium as a reaction to what he saw as the fragmented state of modern culture. While these initial studies provide a great deal of information on Yeats' geography, they treated it primarily as a symbolic system and not as a spatial construction, as described in recent spatial theory.



The shift in focus towards post-colonial studies in the critical analysis of literature, led to an alteration in the way in which the geographical imagination of Yeats is analyzed through the lens of criticism. Lloyd's (1993), *Anomalous States*, provided a strong critique of Yeats' nationalistic views; claiming that he used his representation of Ireland as an idyllic mythological land to suppress the actual, violent history of colonialism. Kiberd's (1995) *Inventing Ireland*, while sympathetic to Yeats', representation of an Irish landscape richly imbued with mythical significance, viewed it as a purposeful counter-hegemonic response to the dominant discourse of colonialism. Cullingford's (1993) *Gender and History in Yeats's Love Poetry* expanded upon the method used in these analyses by examining the gendered dimensions of Yeats' conceptualization of space. Howes (1996) *Yeats's Nations* examined how Yeats' imagined geography, including Byzantium, participate in Orientalist conventions for constructing the East as the spatial "other" of the modern West, relying on Said's (1978) work *Orientalism*. Although the above-mentioned post-colonial studies have identified significant aspects of Yeats' geographical imagination, none of them have incorporated the theory-based methodology of geocriticism into their analytical frameworks.

The literature produced by the spatial turn is so far very successful in applying its theoretical resources to many different kinds of literary works; however, the extension of these resources into modernist poetry is still underdeveloped. Tally's (2013) *Spatiality* has contributed to broadening the scope of spatial literary theory across all genres and time frames; she effectively demonstrates how geocritical approaches can be used in lyric poetry. Prieto (2013), in demonstrating the flexible nature of geocritical analysis as an approach toward non-realistic and symbolist literatures, confirms that the geocritical model is applicable to poetry where geographical space is equally constructed from both an imaginative/desire-based perspective as from a purely empirical reference perspective. Heggland's (2012) work regarding modernist geographies also illustrates the productive potential of using a spatial approach toward early twentieth century poetry; in doing so, he demonstrates how the imaginative cartographies of modernist poets encode ideological/philosophical commitments that cannot be analyzed through traditional formalism. The various methodologies



developed within the geocritical framework were solidified via Tally's (2011) edited volume of geocritical explorations. This solidification confirmed that Westphal's methodology can be used to analyze a wide variety of literary traditions, genres, and time periods.

Within Yeats studies there has not yet emerged any significant attempt to engage with Westphal's geocritical model. A geocritical analysis of his works could potentially uncover perspectives that are unavailable via the more common scholarly analyses of his work: a geocritical model can help explain the complex spatio-temporality of his representations of Ireland, provide a clearer definition of the utopian quality of his representation of Byzantium, and demonstrate the dialectical relationship between the two geographic spaces in a manner that binary symbolic models do not allow. Therefore, it is this gap at the juncture of Yeats studies, geocritical theories, and modernist spatial studies that this article directly addresses.

Geocriticism, as developed by Westphal (2011), serves as the primary theoretical framework for this study. Central to Westphal's approach is the idea that space, consistent with the principles of the spatial turn, is not merely a physical setting but a construct shaped by social, historical, and imaginative forces. Consequently, space is understood as inherently ideological. By translating these theoretical assumptions into analytical practice, geocriticism identifies three key conceptual dimensions that guide the interpretation of literary spaces.

Firstly, Westphal identifies spatio-temporalities, the mutually constitutive relationships between spatial and temporal representations within literature. By drawing upon Bakhtin's (1981) ideas regarding the chronotope "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (Bakhtin 1981, p. 84), Westphal further develops this understanding to show that spaces depicted in literature are palimpsests. That is, these spaces are formed by the superimposing of various temporal layers with each layer partially effacing and partially preserving what existed previously. A critical aspect of this spatio-temporal analysis of Yeats' depiction of Ireland is the manner in which mythological, colonial and postcolonial temporal registers intersect in a space of creative tension.



Secondly, Westphal introduces the concept of transgression. Transgression refers to the ability of depictions of space in literature to traverse, undermine and redefine existing spatial, cultural or ontological boundaries. Westphal draws on Foucault's (1984) definitions of heterotopias "spaces that are different from all others, and yet implicitly critique all others" (Foucault 1986, p. 46) and de Certeau's (1998) understanding of de-territorialization, "processes that disrupt established territorial formations, opening up new potentialities." (de Certeau 1998, p. 508). For the analysis of Yeats' poetry, transgression enables an interpretation of the imaginary journey from Ireland to Byzantium as being simultaneous crossings of geographical, temporal and ontological boundaries.

Thirdly, Westphal addresses the issue of referentiality; that is, the relationship between representations of space in literature and the "real" geographical spaces to which those representations refer. Westphal (2011) identifies three forms of referentiality mimesis (strongly mimetic), intermediaries (intermediary) and pure imagination (purely imaginary) – and suggests that the most powerful spaces represented in literature fall at the intermediate point between fiction and reality. Both Ireland and Byzantium represent such an intermediary referentiality in Yeats' poetry.

Westphal's geocriticism fits into the larger spatial turn with Lefebvre (1991) who said in his book "The Production of Space" that "space is socially produced", and that it has been historically constructed through various labor, representation and symbolisms.

Lefebvre (1991) also distinguishes three categories of "spaces": Spatial Practice represents how people move about in their physical environment; Representations of Space relate to how we understand our physical environments (through maps, etc.); and Representational Spaces are the places that people imagine or create for themselves, based on some sort of imaginative or symbolic investment in those places.



Yeats's poetic landscapes are best understood as Representational Spaces. Yeats's poetry, while it may reference real locations, primarily constructs a new geography through the use of symbolism. Soja (1996) uses the term Thirdspace to describe this type of experience that blends geographical reality with its conceptualization. This can be seen as an expansion of Westphal's (2010) intermediary referentiality, since the strength of Thirdspace lies in creating a relationship between what is imagined and what exists.

In Soja's (1996) terms, Yeats' Byzantium is a Thirdspace because it is neither a pure fiction nor a historical location like Constantinople. Rather, the power of Yeats' Byzantium comes from being able to maintain the tension between the two. The city is a place where both the actual and the imaginary coexist.

Huyssen (2003) describes the urban palimpsest as a city that includes multiple time layers at once. He argues that cities are never one single layer, but rather include all of the history of previous layers at the same time. Huyssen's idea allows for an examination of Yeats' Ireland as a spatio-temporal palimpsest.

This investigation's practical research approach relies upon an empirical application of theory-based close reading. This close reading was based upon four poems which I had analyzed intensively because they met all of the above mentioned criteria for inclusion in the investigation. Spatial centrality was the first criterion. These poems represent the most explicit and philosophically rich depictions of Ireland and Byzantium as imaginative geography. Chronologically, the four poems examined represent more than forty years of Yeats's writing career. Therefore, the close readings of these four poems provided the investigator with a complete picture of Yeats's evolving spatial imagination. Canonicity, or how well-known a poet's works are, is also a criterion. All four poems included in this study are part of the established canon of Yeats's most significant and most frequently discussed works. Implicitly, there was another criterion — demonstrability through method. Since the poems used in this investigation exhibit a clear and varied degree of spatial construction (enough so that each of the three geocriticism concepts developed by Westphal could be utilized



effectively) it was possible to demonstrate clearly and rigorously how each concept applies to Yeats's spatial imagination. If a larger body of texts had been used, there would be too much to analyze in each poem individually. Consequently, using only the four poems listed here allowed me to conduct my analysis at a level of detail necessary for investigating such complex spatial imagination. In addition to focusing upon how the spatial relationships among objects described in the poems are created and what those relationships imply about their "real world" referents, the close readings in this study focused upon several other aspects. First, it focused upon the use of spatial prepositions and directional verbs. Second, it focused upon the ways in which spatial boundaries are both constructed and transcended. Third, it focused upon how temporalities influence descriptions of space. Lastly, it attended to how the spatial relationships depicted in the poems relate to their actual geographical referents. Those specific analytic foci were drawn directly from Westphal's (2011) geocritical model. The primary corpus is complemented by *A Vision* (Yeats, 1937). *A Vision* provides a philosophical prose context for understanding the spatial constructs found in the poems' content, providing further evidence supporting Vendler's (1963) assertion that Yeats's poetry and philosophical prose illuminate one another (p. 8).

The idea of the "spatial palimpsest" by Westphal (2011) is the most relevant to analyzing the geography of Yeats's Ireland. A "palimpsestic" quality is best exemplified in "The Lake Isle of Innisfree", a poem from Yeats (1990). In this poem, a real geographic location (the small island located at Lough Gill in County Sligo) which Yeats had been familiar with as a child, is transfigured into a space with three different qualities: past, pastoral and mythological;

*I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree, And a small cabin
build there, of clay and wattles made: Nine bean-rows will I have
there, a hive for the honey-bee, And live alone in the bee-loud
glade.*

The referential dimension of this text is evident: Innisfree will have an exact location in terms of mapping for County Sligo. In addition to being able to locate the physical



characteristics of the area, the sensory details that Yeats provides (the buzz of bees, the sound of the water) are all part of a recognizable and specific environment. However, Innisfree has been transformed into something else due to its association with Tír na n-Óg which is the Celtic other world or "land of the young" where the eternal youth and beauty exist; Tír na n-Óg occurs in many parts of Ireland's traditions (Kiberd, 1995, p. 104). Therefore, Innisfree is situated within the middle ground between the clearly referential and completely imaginative that Westphal (2011), calls the defining feature of the best literary geographies (p. 112); i.e., Innisfree is both a place on earth, and a utopian ideal, and therefore a geographic reference point and a temporal fantasy.

The layered spatial dimensions of the Yeats Irish palimpsest becomes more complex and richly mythologically detailed in "The Wandering of Aengus" (Yeats, 1990) where he transforms the ancient Celtic myth of Aengus, an Irish god of love and poetry into a lyric story about a person on a journey that has no end. The world of the poem is both the actual landscapes of Ireland as well as the mythical land of the Celts; the boundary between what is human and supernatural are constantly crossed in the poem's world.

*Though I am old with wandering Through hollow lands and hilly
lands, I will find out where she has gone, And kiss her lips and take
her hands; And pluck till time and times are done The silver apples
of the moon, The golden apples of the sun.*

The geographical area through which Aengus travels acts similarly to the "transgressive" space described by Westphal (2011), p. 78. This type of geographic area is one in which the spatial divides historically separating the world of mythology from the world of history dissolve; the mortal from the immortal; and where multiple temporal registers exist simultaneously.

By the time Yeats writes his final poems in the 1920s-30s, Yeats' depiction of Ireland has undergone an important shift. The idealized landscape of Yeats' early works, in which Irish landscapes were depicted as a symbolic space for Irish identity, now



becomes a dystopic vision of the "space of biological reproduction and temporal decay," from which the older intellectual-poet feels removed.

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

That is no country for old men. They will not find that country suitable for them to live in. "That Country" means Ireland where the old poet is living at present, from where he sails to Byzantium. The country he has left for sailing to Byzantium is described in the remaining lines of the first stanza. In the lines, "The young... and dies" the poet has described Ireland, the country of physical and sensual life. The former country is not a welcoming place for those who are older. In the second line, Yeats writes, "The young/ In one another's arms, birds in the trees." The speaker's former home sounds idyllic. As the young lovers are wrapped in each other's arms, the birds are singing in the trees. It means in the country, young people enjoy the pleasures of love. Yeats's seems to be commenting on the creatures who inhabit his former land. Instead of concentrating on the things that will last forever, they instead only enjoy what is right in front of them at any given moment. The waterfalls of "That country" are crowded with salmon fish. Besides, the seas there are teeming with mackerel fish. All these creatures (birds and fish) listen to sensual music and do not indulge in intellectual or artistic activity.

In Yeats's mature poetry, Byzantium is the systematized opposition to the dystopian conditions of Ireland; it serves as an idealized utopia where those values excluded from the national space in Ireland -- the aesthetic permanence, spiritual transcendence, and Unity of Being -- can be fully actualized. I am using "utopian" in its specific philosophic meaning articulated by Jameson (2005); it denotes both the "non-place" (outopos) and "good place" (euphos) of a space that has been idealized precisely for being a non-geographical reality, yet also a critical negation of the dystopian conditions of the historical present (Jameson, p. 3). As described by Yeats in *A Vision*, at the time of Emperor Justinian's reign, the poet envisioned Byzantium as an aesthetically/spiritually cohesive "space" where religious/aesthetic/practical

aspects of life were unified under a single entity known as "Unity of Being" (Yeats, 1937, p. 279). It is important to note that this representation is directly opposed to the fragmented nature of modern Western society, and that Byzantium represents the moment when artistic/spiritual cohesion/unity was most completely achieved.

Transgressivity is another key term employed in analyzing "Sailing to Byzantium" as a spatial text. In this poem, there is a central motion -- or movement -- by the speaker to travel from their biological home in Ireland to the aesthetically/spiritually unified "home" of Byzantium. This motion constitutes a transgression in Westphal's definition -- i.e., the act of moving across the boundary separating two fundamentally disparate spaces/time frames (Westphal, 2011, p. 89).

*O sages standing in God's holy fire As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre, And be the singing-
masters of my soul. Consume my heart away; sick with desire And
fastened to a dying animal It knows not what it is; and gather me
Into the artifice of eternity.*

The "artifice of eternity" is the main idea that connects to Yeats's utopian geography. In contrast with a natural setting, Byzantium is an artificial environment created through art, craftsmanship, and design instead of being a product of the natural world. It represents a state of being outside of biological time -- or, at least, it represents the attempt to be so. The sages of this area are their own creations; they exist within the unchanging, eternal now of the Byzantine mosaic, unaffected by the cycle of birth and decay. As noted by Kermode (1957), the desire for this state of being an art object was the central aspiration of the Romantic Image tradition, and Byzantium is the full-fledged geographical representation of this image (p. 121). Furthermore, according to Westphal (2011), what is particularly relevant to this issue is how this desire for transcendence was represented as a desire for a different physical location -- a utopian geographic counter-image that has characteristics directly opposed to those found in Ireland.



The companion poem "Byzantium" (Yeats, 1990), also addresses utopia and geographic space, however now with an increased level of conflict and contradiction that complicates the previous poems dialectical relationship of space. At midnight, in the city, "the unpurged images of day recede", and "a starlit or a moonlit dome disdains / all that man is / all mere complexities / the fury and the mire of human veins". A geocritical reading of this opening displays a complex spatial construction for defining utopia; the utopian space of Byzantium is not only positive (as a space of aesthetic perfection) but negative and aggressive based on "all that man is." As stated by Jameson (2005), every utopian space defines itself through exclusion; therefore, the effort to exclude requires an amount of energy from which to demonstrate the power of what is excluded (p. 17). The "unpurged images" of the first line suggests that there will be no total purification; thus, the utopian space is vulnerable to contamination by biological and temporal energies that attempt to escape. Westphals (2011) concept of transgression illustrates the fluidity of these boundaries; the boundaries between the utopian space of Byzantium and the dystopian space of biological existence are in constant contest (p. 89).

4.5 The Spatial Dialectic: Interdependence and the Limits of Transcendence

The most striking evidence of this dialectical relationship in "Sailing to Byzantium" can be seen in the structural organization of the poem.

The movement from Ireland to Byzantium is not a move of transcendence; it's a move of both desire, tension and unresolved conflict. The first stanza has a level of sensuality and visual detail ("the salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas") that contrasts with an obvious sense of desire to leave, as well as an obvious attraction/repulsion. As Ellmann (1948) noted, Yeats' relationship with nature is never simply one of rejection or denial -- rather, he loves something he cannot have and his dissatisfaction is such that it cannot be resolved (p. 238).

In short, while Ireland serves as the dystopian space where the speaker leaves behind what was once loved and familiar, it also serves as the very foundation upon which the speaker's longing for the atemporal aesthetic world of Byzantium is based.



The dialectical dependency discussed above, can be found in what Yeats (in *A Vision*) calls "the primary" and "antithetical" tinctures -- the two principal ways of experiencing reality that are constantly rotating about one another as depicted in the form of the Gyre, with each generating the other (Yeats, 1937, page 73). Polyphony, the ability of a literature space to support many and often contradictory forms of representation at once, is also relevant for analyzing the dialectical relationship between these tinctures (Westphal, 2011; page 130). Yeats' Ireland, therefore is not simply a singular physical construction of space, but rather a polyphonic space that includes simultaneously the mythical, the politically contested, and the vital biological. Likewise, Yeats' Byzantium is not simply a utopian fantasy space, but a polyphonic imaginative geography that depicts an ongoing struggle towards an idealized beauty -- a struggle that will always remain fragile due to being dependent upon the biological and temporal world from which it attempts to transcend. The geocritical reading reveals the complex dialectical nature of both spaces in a manner that would necessarily be missed through either a symbolic or merely ideological reading.

Conclusion

This article has presented a geocritical reading of W. B. Yeats's imaginative geography through a selection of poems spanning the major phases of his literary career. The analysis has revealed four principal findings. First, Yeats's Ireland



emerges as a spatio-temporal palimpsest composed of three interconnected temporal layers—mythological, colonial, and biological—which coexist to create a geographically and ideologically complex literary space. Second, Byzantium functions as a utopian counter-space distinguished by aesthetic permanence, spiritual transcendence, and the ideal of the Unity of Being. At the same time, its exclusionary nature demonstrates that Yeats's idealized space is philosophically and ideologically complex rather than simply escapist. Third, the study highlights the dialectical relationship between Ireland and Byzantium, showing that the poet's longing for spiritual transcendence remains inseparable from his emotional attachment to the temporal and material world. Finally, the analysis demonstrates that Yeats's spatial imagination carries ideological implications, engaging with cultural nationalism and orientalism while resisting reduction to any single ideological framework.

The study contributes to scholarship in several important ways. It offers a spatial perspective on Yeats's poetry that complements established mythological, historical, and postcolonial approaches, thereby expanding the critical understanding of his imaginative landscapes. It also demonstrates the usefulness of geocriticism for the study of lyric poetry, a genre that has received relatively limited attention within geocritical research. By applying concepts such as spatio-temporality, referentiality, transgressivity, and polyphony More broadly, the findings contribute to modernist studies by reinforcing the importance of spatial theory in understanding literary responses to the cultural and social transformations of modernity.

Future research could extend this approach by examining Yeats's complete poetic canon, comparing his imagined spaces with those of other modernist writers, or investigating the influence of his spatial imagination on later Irish and international literature. Ultimately, Yeats's Ireland and Byzantium demonstrate that literary space is not merely a setting for human experience but a dynamic force through which history, identity, ideology, and spiritual aspiration are imagined and negotiated. As such, his poetry provides a compelling example of the value of geocriticism for understanding the relationship between literary imagination and the construction of space.

References

Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays* (C. Emerson & M. Holquist, Trans.; M. Holquist, Ed.). University of Texas Press.



- Culler, J. (2015). *Theory of the lyric*. Harvard University Press.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1987). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia* (B. Massumi, Trans.). University of Minnesota Press. (Original work published 1980)
- Ellmann, R. (1948). *Yeats: The man and the masks*. Macmillan.
- Foucault, M. (1984). *Of other spaces: Utopias and heterotopias* (J. Miskowiec, Trans.). *Architecture / Mouvement / Continuité*, 5, 46–49.
- Hegglund, J. (2012). *World views: Metageographies of modernist fiction*. Oxford University Press.
- Howes, M. (1996). *Yeats's nations: Gender, class, and Irishness*. Cambridge University Press.
- Huyssen, A. (2003). *Present pasts: Urban palimpsests and the politics of memory*. Stanford University Press.
- Jameson, F. (2005). *Archaeologies of the future: The desire called utopia and other science fictions*. Verso.
- Kermode, F. (1957). *Romantic image*. Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Kiberd, D. (1995). *Inventing Ireland: The literature of the modern nation*. Jonathan Cape.
- Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The production of space* (D. Nicholson-Smith, Trans.). Blackwell. (Original work published 1974)
- Lloyd, D. (1993). *Anomalous states: Irish writing and the post-colonial moment*. Duke University Press.
- Prieto, E. (2013). *Literature, geography, and the postmodern poetics of place*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books.
- Soja, E. W. (1996). *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and other real-and-imagined places*. Blackwell.
- Tally, R. T. (Ed.). (2011). *Geocritical explorations: Space, place, and mapping in literary and cultural studies*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tally, R. T. (2013). *Spatiality*. Routledge.
- Vendler, H. H. (1963). *Yeats's "Vision" and the later plays*. Harvard University Press.
- Yeats, W. B. (1937). *A vision* (2nd ed.). Macmillan.



Yeats, W. B. (1990). *The collected poems of W. B. Yeats* (R. J. Finneran, Ed.; Rev. 2nd ed.). Scribner. (Original works published 1889–1939)