

**Landscape and the Supernatural within William Butler
Yeats's Early Poems**

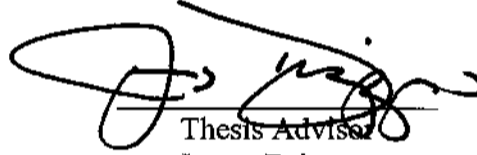
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Landscape and the Supernatural within William Butler Yeats's Early Poems

So we fix our eyes not on what is seen but at what is unseen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

– Corinthians 4:18

William Butler Yeats is Ireland's best known poet, having written twelve books of poetry and twenty-six plays. His life spanned from June 13, 1865 to January 28, 1939, and through these years his poetry was constantly expanding and evolving as he searched for his idea of what material a poet should be writing about. Many critics, including Harold Bloom, Thomas Parkinson, and James A. Notopoulos, feel that Yeats's early poems are frivolous and silly, dealing in large part with the supernatural. They propose that Yeats' writings get better over time, more mature, but in focusing only on the later work, they overlook the pure brilliance of Yeats early poems; they overlook how the two worlds, the world that we live in and the world that is beyond our understanding, which Yeats describes are really one world, interconnected, each affecting the other. Using his first three books of poetry: *Crossways* (1889), *The Rose* (1893), and *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899), as well as his play, *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894), we will examine how Yeats's two worlds intersect, the outcome when they do, and his reason for writing about these two different dimensions.

The supernatural in Yeats poetry is shown mostly through his admiration of Irish folklore, which he felt was fading away in modern times, believing that few people in Ireland still remembered about the days of faeries. At the same time Yeats was trying to rescue Ireland's folklore, he also sought to revive folklore because it demonstrated something unique about

Ireland, a “special feature of Irish culture that could be used to give Ireland a separate and meaningful identity, at a time when Ireland was again struggling to free itself from British rule” (Purkiss 294). Folklore, by definition, is myths that are passed down through the ages and have been around as long as human culture has been around. Jan Harold Brunvand, a folklore historian, writes in his book Folklore: A Study and Research Guide, “We may assume that the materials of folklore, such as traditional sayings, stories, beliefs, customs, games, and dance, have themselves been in existence as long as language and the rest of culture” (7). Each and every country has its own myths that surround it and Yeats along with Lady Augusta Gregory, a contemporary writer and a close friend of Yeats who compiled a book of folklore and belief, wanted Ireland’s myths to become as influential as those of Greece and Rome. Like other mythic heroes Achilles and Aeneas, they wished for people to know about Cuchulain, Ireland’s great hero of legend. Perhaps more importantly, they also wanted people to understand the myths surrounding “the Good People,” mischievous visitors from the “other world,” who delighted in leading away poor innocent children to their world, a world that we cannot even begin to imagine outside of our dreams, which are themselves gateways to this other world (Byrd 12).

Yeats is, in fact, describing two worlds throughout his text: the world of mortal creatures and the world of immortal creatures. Thomas L. Byrd Jr., a Yeats’s scholar, notes this in his book The Early Poems of W. B. Yeats: “The world of immortal creatures (such as fairies) and the world of mortal creatures are really one and the same” and “[Yeats] is describing a universe in which two worlds are really one world. Man, through the process of civilization, has lost the capacity to see the ‘other world’” (11). Yeats portrays the world of mortals as the world that a person can see, reach out and touch with their finger tips. It is a world that is free of the magic that Yeats seeks. The other world as described by Yeats through much of his poetry is a world

that is free of death and free of the suffering of the mortal world. The other world, conveyed by folklorists, is a world that lies underground with specific centers in natural hills, prehistoric chamber-tombs or ruined forts (Bruford 147) and also in the Tir-nan-Org “country of the young” which is the land of the faery fold (Conner 34). These are the places that faeries inhabit both in folklore and Yeats’ poems, and though sometimes [faeries are] forced underground, they have always reemerged (Silver 9). These two worlds, according to Yeats, exist on a common ground and are not really separated as much as one might think; for there are ways to see the other world if one knows where to look. However, we are not meant to take the other world lightly, for there are consequences for searching for the other world and trespassing through its lands. For Yeats, this other world holds knowledge that is hidden to us mortals and throughout Yeats’ life he continued to search for this knowledge.

“The Stolen Child” tells the story of a child who is tempted by the faeries to go over to the other side, to leave the world of suffering that is our world and join the world of the imaginary. Yeats describes the visible landscape in the opening of the poem:

Where drips the rocky highland
Of Sleuth Wood Lake,
There lies a leafy island
Where flapping herons wake. (lines 1-4)

While Sleuth Wood Lake is a very real place within Ireland, Yeats gives a very mystical sense to it; he creates an almost unreal scene about it. To understand this better the reader turns to Lester I. Conner, the author of *A Yeats Dictionary*, to see where Sleuth Wood Lake lies. Sleuth Wood is a woodland “on the south shore of Loung Gill” which lies only a few miles from Sligo near the town of Dromahair (Conner 173). Through having these specific places mentioned, Yeats is

trying to make his readers understand Ireland, trying to make his reader familiar with Ireland's landscape, creating Ireland in an eye that has never before seen Ireland or known about its places, its wonders. At the same time, he is talking about the supernatural aspect by focusing on Ireland's folklore which predates Christianity, which arrived sometime around the 5th century C.E.

The supernatural aspect of the poem is most evident in the words that are spoken by fairies in tempting the young child to go with them to their world. The words they speak are sweet and very convincing. Many people would be persuaded by them:

Come away, O human child

To the waters and the wild

With a faery, hand in hand

For the world's more full of weeping that you can understand. (lines 9-12)

and again:

We seek for slumbering trout

And whispering in their ears

Give them unquiet dreams (lines 32-34).

Yeats weaves these two worlds together by describing the real world that we see, a place that the reader can go and visit, and the world that is beyond our own comprehension, the world of faeries. Yeats's skill as a poet moves us from one world to the next, making the world that we cannot see more real to us as readers. To better understand what Yeats is talking about when he mentions faeries we turn to the writings of Frank Kinahan. Kinahan discusses the issue of what faeries are in his book Yeats, Folklore and Occultism:

Who are they? 'Fallen angels who were not good enough to be saved, nor bad enough to

be lost,' says the peasantry. 'The gods of the earth,' says the Book of Armagh. 'The gods of pagan Ireland,' says the Irish antiquarians, 'the Tuatha De Danan, who, when no longer worshipped and fed offerings, dwindled away in the popular imagination, and now are only a few spans high. (47)

The Danaan, as mentioned above, are also known as the Sidhe. Kathleen A. Heinige writes about the origin of the Sidhe in her piece "'Untiring Joys and Sorrows': Yeats and the Sidhe:" "The Sidhe might be the spirits of the dead, or the ancient gods 'in a degraded form,' or 'a folk-memory of a very ancient race of mortals'" (102). Scholars of folklore are still deciding which of these viewpoints is right, but they will likely never come to a complete answer. Yeats is recreating these faeries of legend in his work because he fears that they are fading away with the Christian influence in Ireland. Diane Purkiss talks about this idea of the shrinking mythology of the Irish nation and how not even the works of Yeats, Lady Gregory, and Maud Gonne could revive faery belief in Ireland (284).

The faeries are doing more than just existing within his poetry, however, because they are influencing the mortal world and taking both things and people from it, freeing them from their mortal bodies and mortal worries as "The Stolen Child" represents. Yeats does not just create his own poetry, for he takes what he knows from the folklore of Ireland and from Lady Gregory. Yeats, in his autobiography, talks about this: "In all these tales some man, woman, or child was believed to be carried off bodily by the faery world, a changeling, some old man or woman perhaps, or perhaps [a] mere heap of shavings bewitched into their likeness, being left instead" (126). Such stories can be found throughout Irish folklore, but one small one belief that Lady Gregory gathered in her book Vision and Belief in the West of Ireland is "when one is taken, the

body is taken as well as the spirit, and some good-for-nothing thing is left in its place. What they take them for is to work for them, and do things they can't do themselves" (132).

"The Hosting of the Sidhe," which can be found in *The Wind Among the Reeds*, like "The Stolen Child" deals with the idea of the other world affecting our world by influencing human beings to step over to the other side. The poem begins with the place of Knocknarea, which is "a famous mountain near Sligo, notable for its flat top on which there is a great cairn" (Conner 102). It is a place where "Queen Maeve, a legendary queen in ancient Ireland, is buried" (Conner 102 and 115). Yeats then begins to talk about the daughter of the king of the Country of the Young, Niamh, and a legendary Irish hero (Conner 123 and 131).

And Niamh is calling *Away, come away:*
Empty your hearts of this mortal dream
The winds awaken, the leaves whirl round,
Our cheeks are pale, our hair is unbound,
Our breasts are heaving, our eyes are a gleam,
Our arms are waving, our lips are apart. (lines 4-9)

The language in both of these poems is very positive, very wild, and very sensual. It is as though readers are not giving themselves over to the other world as they are giving into nature itself, losing their humanity for happiness and maybe becoming something more like a monster because of it.

Both of these poems show a happily-ever-after version of the situation (Kinahan 44). However, the play *The Land of Hearts Desire* gives a much darker view point on this issue, for the play deals with the death of the young girl who calls upon the faery child; she gives up and leaves the human world behind. According to Anne Saddlemyer in her piece "The Heroic

Discipline of the Looking-Glass,” Yeats plays are very similar to Yeats’ poems in the way they are written, for she claims that they are very poetic in nature, holding many of the same qualities that his poems achieve (89).

The opening of this play sets the reader in the Irish country of Sligo, which is where Sleuth Wood lies. The reader can see Irish customs and beliefs through the setting of the play, which Yeats describes as “a room with a hearth on the floor in the middle of a deep alcove to the right. There are benches in the alcove and a table; and a crucifix on the wall” (34). The reader of this play can see the simplicity of the home life of the common Irish family and through the use of the crucifix Yeats comments on religion and superstition within the average home. One can also see Ireland clearly through the characters of Mary, Bridget, Maurteen, and Shawn Bruin, along with Father Hart. In this play, along with many of his poems, Yeats deals with normal people in a normal Irish setting and then mixes this normalcy with the aspect of the supernatural to make the divisions between the worlds seem less real.

One of the aspects of this play that creates the common man within Yeats’s work is the superstitions that they hold so dear, but in this play these superstitions turn out to be all too real, the dangers in the dark are all too real. The family says that Mary should not speak out the name of “the Good People,” and so she calls them out in jest:

Come, faeries, take me out of this dull house!

Let me have all the freedom that I have lost;

Work when I will and idle when I will!

Faeries, come take me out of the dull world,

For I would ride with you upon the wind. (Yeasts 39)

The faery child, however, responds to her calls and comes to the house for Mary has summoned it there:

One called

I sent my messenger for milk and fire;

She called again and I came. (Yeats 44)

Thus, this is a summons to take Mary out of this world, take her away from her mediocre life, almost like the faeries call in the poem "The Stolen Child," except this time it is being spoken by a human to the other side. Besides summoning the faery child, Mary has also given milk and fire to two other strange old people just minutes before, something that should not be done according to faery lore. In much of the same way that a vampire cannot enter a home without invitation, neither can a faery enter without first being invited. When the faery child arrives in the form of a young girl they give her bread, milk, and set her by the fire. The faery child has a very calming presence for just prior to her arrival the air in the cabin was tense with the families frustration towards Mary because of her action that called upon the faeries, but as soon as the child comes everything becomes calm again and lively when the faery starts to dance. Faeries have this ability, as seen in the previous two poems, as well as in this play. This piece then is full of superstition about what people are supposed to do when faced with a faery, for "there are certain rules that must be observed by humans who have dealings with fairies, and those who ignore them do so at their peril" (Crossly-Holland 10).

Near the end of the play, the faery child spots the cross on the wall and shrieks, demanding it be removed from sight. Father Hart slowly rises and takes the cross out of the room. The removal of the cross makes the faery powerful as though the symbol of the cross represents the whole aspect of the religion itself. The cross, as a symbol "can act as the gateway

to the apprehension of a reality that eludes everyday consciousness” (Owen 139). So by the act of the Father removing the cross, he is in fact abandoning the wisdom that God provides and also abandoning his faith as it were, giving rise to the power of the faery.

Father Hart’s character is a necessary one in order to give the reader a sense of the two religions clashing, while at the same time, the priest gives us a new understanding of how the Christian religion in Ireland views the Gods and mythological beings of the old ways:

God spreads the heavens about us like great wings
 And gives us a little round of deeds and days,
 And then comes the wrecked angles and set snares
 And bait them with light hopes and heavy dreams
 Until the heart is puffed with pride and goes. (Yeats 36)

These creatures lure people away from their ordained path and lead them into the world that Yeats is describing, where there is nothing to worry about anymore, which goes along with how Heinige in her article later views the transformation that faeries undergo in Irish culture:

So many angels chose to leave heaven with Lucifer that God was in danger of being left alone. He therefore ordered the gates of heaven and hell to be shut simultaneously. Those who had already fallen as far as hell became devils; those who had not fallen at all remained angels; while those who were caught in-between became fairies. (102)

Christianity changed the idea of the old world religion that had always existed in Ireland since people first started to settle there. UNCA Professor David Hopes spoke about how Ireland had a unique form of Christianity, which incorporated folk and pagan religion, and adapted it to Christianity (Hopes lecture). But these two religions did not exist in harmony with one another and as time went on the old world religions began slowly disappearing.

While Christianity increases, it requires that folk religion be repudiated and slowly disappear in the modern age. In this respect Christianity is limited in its knowledge; it illuminates everything else and claims to be the ultimate truth, and this is what Yeats disagrees with throughout his life. He does not find solace in the religion of the masses. At the same time the old world religion is turned into something evil, something sinister that can be seen in looking at the faery child and how the priest talks about the faeries. But while both of these religions often focus on the unseen, Yeats chooses to look at the other world through the old world religion.

The child's words are sweet, but at the same time also cold and commanding. Some of them are a repetition of the words spoken earlier by Mary after she had been interrupted while reading a story on folklore:

But I can lead you, newly-married bride,
Where nobody gets old and crafty and wise,
Where nobody gets old and godly and grave,
Where nobody gets old and bitter of tongue,
And where kind tongues bring no captivity. (Yeats 45)

These lines spoken by the faery child have also been spoken by Mary at the beginning of the story. The repetition of lines can be seen throughout this play as well as throughout his poems. For instance in "The Stolen Child" the line "*Come away, O human child*" is repeated in each of the four stanzas. This gives the reader both a sense of importance placed upon these lines as well as the sense that Yeats' poems are linked with an oral tradition that can be found in folklore, which has been passed down by the word of mouth for generations. Yeats is recreating this feeling of oral tradition for the reader, and he suggests that the reader loses something in just

silently reading the poems to themselves; to understand them fully one needs to read them out loud, almost chant them, or have them read out loud (Spangler 141).

It is interesting that the character of the child is a child in this play because she seems to be so much older than a child, much too wise about the ways of the earth, for she even says,

When I was born for the first time? I think

I am much older than the eagle-cock

(that blinks and blinks on Ballygawley Hill,)

And he is the oldest thing under the moon. (Yeats 44)

In the world of immortals time passes differently than it does in the world of mortals. Heinige's writes, "Do not think the fairies are always little. Everything is capricious about them, even their size. They seem to take what size or shape pleases them. Their chief occupations are feasting, fighting, making love, and playing the most beautiful music" (102). Beautiful music is exactly what the child performs, first in the scene when she is arriving, which is kind of a song to no one in particular, but then she performs the song for the family, and finally there is singing at the end:

The wind blows out of the gate of the day,

The wind blows over the lonely heart,

And the lonely heart is withered away.

While the faeries dance in a place apart,

Shaking their milk-white feet in a ring

Tossing their milk-white arms in the air. (Yeats 41)

The song at the beginning and at the end are the same song, but at different times in the poem they mean different things. The first time it is a sad song because the faery child is out there all alone in the cold until Mary brings her in by the fire, but at the end it is more of a song of joy to

be free from the burden of the human heart. Singing and dancing are parts of faery life according to many scholars on the subject including Kinahan and Heininge. They note that humans often joined the faeries in dancing not realizing that they were faeries. But these lines seem to be somehow at the heart the contrast between the two worlds, and where humans wither away and die in the mortal world while the Danaan, the faeries, stay youthful and dance in their own worlds.

The faerie child in this play, unlike the poems above, is a negative figure, a malevolent presence in this play, for the child comes by night and then kills the poor girl and leaves her body behind. It is not a positive image, though the reader understands that she has gone to a better place. In effect the child doesn't even give Mary a chance or a choice because it says, "You shall go with me, newly-married bride" leaving no real room for argument (Yeats 45). Either it knows the future, which is entirely possible for a wise faery to know such things or it is making up her mind for her.

The real similarity between "The Stolen Child," "The Hosting of the Sidhe," and *The Land of Hearts Desire*, is in the faery offering to the human child and the language itself is very similar, which can be seen in the quote below:

But clinging mortal hope must fall from you,
 For we who ride the wind, run on the waves,
 And dance upon the mountains are more light
 Than dewdrops on the banner of dawn. (Yeats 46)

Once again we have the idea of a human being having to shed their mortal skin, give up what they hold dear, in order to obtain the other world that the faery child speaks of. The other world,

as the faery child says, is a world of freedom where our world is a world of limitations laid down by our own flesh and our own hope.

The idea of the newly-married bride being taken away is a common theme in Irish folklore, for another of Yeats's pieces that deals with this aspect of "the good folk" taking away a bride, is poem "The Host of the Air," which is found in *The Wind Among the Reeds*. In this poem one can see the Yeats' two worlds touch once again for the poem mentions Hart Lake, which is 'located southwest of the town of Sligo' at the end of the first stanza of the poem. The reader can see, once again, how Yeats is attaching the real world and the other world through a real place that can be seen. (Conner 83).

This poem is inspired directly from an old Irish folk tale that was told to Yeats by "Ballysadares's 'little old woman in a white hat.' It was a story on its own that Yeats took to make a poem:

A young man going at nightfall to the house of his just married bride, met in the way with a jolly company, and with them his bride. They were faeries, and had stolen her as a wife for the chief of their band. To him they seemed only a company of merry mortals. His bride, when she saw her old love, bade him welcome, but was most fearful lest he should eat the faery food, and so be glamoured out of the earth into the bloodless dim nation, wherefore she set him down to play cards with three of the cavalcade; and he played on, realizing nothing until he saw the chief of the band carrying his bride away in his arms.
(Kinahan 53)

"The Host of the Air" follows this tale that Yeats had heard. Knowing the folk tale behind this story helps in the understanding of the Yeats work so that a reader understands that the young

man, O'Driscoll, has just been married and the reason that the his wife didn't want him to eat the food of the hosts of the air:

But Bridget drew him by the sleeve
 And from the merry bands,
 To old men playing at cards
 With a twinkling of ancient hands. (lines 21-24)

Lady Wilde says that the human beings that go over to the faery realm, "[The fairies] have no objection to offer to mortals the subtle red wine at fairy banquets, which lulls the soul to sleep and makes the reason powerless. The young men that they beguile into their fairy palaces become their bond-slaves, and are set to hard tasks (Kinahan 45). The fairies themselves would have taken him away if not for his wife's interference; it was a true show of love for her old love, even though she is now with the chief of the hosts of the air, she may still have a little bit of a human heart left.

This also explores the idea of the Celtic faery looking more like humans, for Kinahan writes, "Celtic fairies are much like common men and women. Often fairy-seers meet with them on the road, and join in their dance, and listen to their music, and do not know what people they are till the whole company melts away into shadow and night" (53). One can see how these stories are related to Yeats's poems, but both the poem and the folk tale above are darker versions, darker than the other works that Yeats has previously written, of this idea of faeries singing and dancing and having a good time with mortal folk before disappearing into the night.

This poem as well focuses somewhat on repetition of lines and phrases. The phrase "long dim hair" is used three times in the poem to describe his wife's hair, but there is also the repetition in the lines, which goes back to the idea of the oral tradition that Yeats is following

throughout his poems. The lines of the piper do this for this poem and like many of Yeats other work the meaning behind the repeated lines slowly changes:

He heard while he sang and dreamed
 A piper piping away,
 And never was piping so sad,
 And never was piping so gay. (lines 9-12)

The happiness is there for the faeries, but it is absent for him because he has lost something that the faeries have gained. At the same time he can still hear the happiness in the tune that they are playing, which shows the duality of his understanding. Yeats would say that this dream like experience has given him some knowledge of the other side so that he can hear the happiness of the pipes through his own sadness.

The name Bridget also stands out in this piece because it was also used in "The Land of Hearts Desire," but in that piece Bridget does not disappear (Purkiss 298). Bridget, according to Purkiss is a very common Irish name; but it is also used, for example in William Wilde's story about a young girl who is abducted by faeries and again used in a poem by William Allingham:

They stole little Bridget
 For seven years long;
 When she came down again
 Her friends were all gone (Purkiss 298).

This a very simple poem that goes on for a couple more lines and ends with the child's death within the real world. Once again we have a faery causing the death of a child from our world. It is the price that one pays for traveling to the faery realm, for death is often times a consequence for those who see the other side.

The poem, "The Man who dreamed of Faeryland," which can be found in *The Rose*, starts off talking about a specific locale, but unlike the other poem this journeys, through a small portion of Ireland. It starts off with the first line of the first stanza: "He stood among a crowd at Drumahair" (line 1) and then jumps to the first line of the second stanza: "He wandered by the sands of Lissadell (line 14). It moves from that to the next stanza, when it says, "He mused beside the well of Scanavin" (line 25) where it finally ends with "He slept under the hill of Lugnagall." The poem starts out with him being within a town which name comes from "Irish, meaning the ridge of the air demons" (Conner 50) until the end of his journey where he falls asleep on the hill which name is also derived from Irish which means "the steep place of the strangers" (Conner 112). Through describing the places Yeats is also describing the man's progression through the country side, into the wild, and into an unsatisfactory grave.

It is a poem about the dreams this common man has about the other world and in each place described above he has a different vision of the other world, but these dreams make him no wiser than he was to begin with. In fact they mess up the calm that he has about his life; he is too worried about the world that he lives in to be concerned about the other world. These creatures sing to him, but he pays them no mind:

A lug-worm with its grey and muddy mouth
 Sang that somewhere in the north or west or south
 There dwelt a gay, exulting, gentle race
 Under the golden or the silver skies
 That if a dancer stayed his hungry foot
 It seemed the sun and moon were in the fruit:
 And at that singing he was no more wise. (lines 19-24)

His mind was constantly on earthly matters, not in the dreams that he had about the other world. This idea of a dream breaking through the barrier between the worlds is something that Yeats definitely believed in and in fact it is something that drove him to study the occult, which we shall mention just a little bit later in this piece. Byrd writes on this idea of dreams breaking through reality, for he writes, “The dream becomes one means of breaking through the artificial barrier. In the world of dreams, the barrier can cease to exist: the symbols seen in dreams often come from and connect us with both the ‘past’ and the ‘present’” (12) The man is far too inattentive to understand the meaning of these things that are being dreamt and being sung to him. He is more concerned about earthly matters of money and love. A stanza that speaks to the idea of love, love for all eternity, is the first stanza with the lines:

And sang what gold morning or evenings sheds
 Upon a woven world-forgotten isle
 Where people lose beside the ravelled seas;
 That Time can never mar a lover’s vow
 Under that woven changeless roof of boughs:
 That singing shook him out of his new ease. (lines 7-12)

The common Irish man is someone Yeats looks upon with great favor in his early poetry, but at the same time he is mocking the man who finds no peace in the grave because he could not look out on the other world and see the knowledge that could come from it. In mocking the common man, Yeats is trying to make him better for his mistakes. The common man, however, doesn’t fully understand this during Yeats’s time, doesn’t understand that one should lay aside superstition and religious teachings and sometimes listen for knowledge in other places, the other world. Christianity has replaced the old religion, but also incorporated it into its soul. But neither

do Christianity and the old religion do not exist in harmony with one another according to Yeats. Christianity is swallowing up the older religion till even the peasants don't remember their own heritage. While he is criticizing their way of life, he is also admires their simple way of life, as many other poets have done throughout time.

"The Unappeasable Host," which can also be found in *The Wind Among the Reeds*, doesn't need to talk about Ireland's landscape in order for it to give us a view of Ireland. The poem itself focuses on a very Irish version of the faery:

The Danaan Children laugh, in cradles of wrought gold,
 And clap their hands together, and half close their eyes,
 For they will ride the North when the ger-eagle flies
 With heavy whitening wings, and a heart fallen cold:
 I kiss my wailing child and press it to my breast,
 And hear the narrow graves calling my child and me. (Lines 1-6)

This definitely a more sinister view of the faeries than see in previously in this text; it is even more terrifying than the "The Hosts of the Air" because for there is no music in this poem, no dance. These faeries are coming from their lofty rest to seize the human child as line six suggests. Kinahan, writes on the subject of the children of the Danaan / Sidhe: "The Sidhe look with envy on the beautiful young human children, and steal them when they can (55). It is said that they envy human beings for being human, being mortal and only living in this world once (Kinahan 55). In this light the faeries aren't pleasant at all; they are more like the faery child from *The Land of Heart's Desire* who came at night to take poor Mary away. It is not until the end of the poem when we once again see the comparison between the Christian church and the

old religion that we get a sense that these creatures are much kinder in their own way than the Christian religion could ever hope to be. The last two lines of the poem read:

... the unappeasable host

Is comelier than the candles at Mother Mary's feet. (lines 11-12)

Once again, Christianity is mixed with old Irish belief within Yeats's work, but here the unappeasable host is kinder than the beliefs of Christianity. In Yeats poetry, as well as many other poets of the time, beauty is considered to be good, kind, and true, never evil. Though the Danaan are feared maybe the mother of the child should be more worried about her new religion that is not as kind as the Danaan. The Danaan, who are represented as the unappeasable host, are kind and gentle, so unlike the faery child from *The Land of Heats Desire*. The peasantry still fears them; however, the people who Yeats is writing to should understand that it is wrong to look for knowledge in one vein of reasoning.

"A Faery Song," which can be found within the book *The Rose*, deals with a lighter side of the faery mythology, a side that has been commonly overlooked since faeries became evil when Christianity came to Ireland. But what really caught my eye when looking at this poem was the way that Yeats constructed it to be read out loud:

We who are so old, old and grey,

O so old!

Thousands of years, thousands of years,

If all were told! (lines 1-4)

In fact the poem itself sounds a lot better out loud than it does in silent reading where the rhyme of the poem and the repetition of the poem are lost. The lines are repeated at the end of the short four stanza poem which gives the reader a feel of repetition that is found within songs. This

returns to the oral tradition that Yeats is attempting to revive. Ireland's folklore was originally passed down through the word of mouth. In this poem he is turning back to a time when the faery folk were still benevolent creatures. This poem is different from the others in the set because in this poem there is no sense of danger from these faeries, no sense that they are going to steal a young child away; in fact, they are wishing the human race health and happiness for the future:

Give to these children, new from the world,
 Silence and love;
 And the long dew-dropping hours of night,
 And the stars above (lines 5-8)

All of the malice that was once there when talking about the Sidhe and how they tricked human beings to come over to their side is absent here; nothing but warm feelings resonate from the lines above as well as throughout the rest of the poem, for the faeries are lending the humans their help. Overall, this poem is just sweet, carefree, and loving, which is a different way to view the faeries within Irish mythology.

Throughout his early work, Yeats focused on the aspect of the folklore and the supernatural within Ireland itself. He clearly shows two worlds within his poems: the natural, beautiful landscape of Ireland envelopes the world that human kind can see and touch, while the body of the poems focuses on the other world, "a world whose beauties are dangerous but real, and a world that poses a threat to man considerably more complex than a display of dead man's bones might suggest" (Kinahan 57). In doing this, he is reviving a belief in an old world religion and the tradition in which it was told. What Yeats is trying to accomplish throughout his early poems is to let the world see Ireland and have them understand Ireland's culture. He is trying to have the world familiarize itself with Irish culture and old Irish gods as it has done with Greek,

Roman, and Egyptian gods. These poems show the conflict between Christianity and the old religions of Ireland and preserve Irish history from being totally enveloped by a foreign religion. Yeats believes strongly that Christianity overlooks the knowledge that can come from the other world, knowledge that lies beyond Christianity's bounds.

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