

# Metapoetry in Selected Works of W.B. Yeats

## W.B. Yeats'in Seçme Eserlerinde Metaşair

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Gönderilme Tarihi / Received Date

4.12.2024

Kabul Tarihi / Accepted Date

14.02.2025

Yayın Tarihi / Publication Date

21.03.2025

**Atıf/Citation:** Azaklı A. Metapoetry in Selected Works of W.B. Yeats *Dil ve Edebiyat Araştırmaları*, 31, 49-62 doi.org/10.30767/diledeara.1596158

### Hakem Değerlendirmesi:

İki Dış Hakem / Çift Taraflı Körleme.

### Çıkar Çatışması:

Yazar çıkar çatışması bildirmemiştir.

### Finansal Destek:

Yazar bu çalışma için finansal destek almadığını beyan etmiştir.

### Peer-review:

Externally peer-reviewed.

### Conflict of Interest:

The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

### Grant Support:

The author declared that this study has received no financial support

### Dil ve Edebiyat Araştırmaları

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### Language and Literature Studies

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tded.org.tr | 2025

## Abstract

This study examines selected works of William Butler Yeats within the framework of metapoetry, a concept that simply refers to poetry written about poetry. The analysed works include "The Balloon of The Mind," "Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931," "Adam's Curse," "The Circus Animals' Desertion," "Ego Dominus Tuus," "A Coat," and "Meditation in Time of War." Additionally, W.H. Auden's "In Memory of W.B. Yeats," written in tribute to Yeats, is also analysed in this context. Focusing on the metapoetic self-reflexivity in these works, this study explores Yeats' poetic consciousness manifests through his engagement with the creative process. It further investigates traces of the poet's ongoing engagement with his own psyche and creative process. By employing metapoetic elements, Yeats not only reflects on the nature of poetry and the act of creation but also exposes the tension between traditional poetic forms and modernist experimentation. The study also examines how metapoetry can emerge not only in explicitly metapoetic works but also in more seemingly ordinary poems, reflecting Yeats' significant engagement with this concept. In doing so, it emphasizes how metapoetic themes deepen the self-questioning power of poetry and illuminates the essence of the creative process.

**Keywords:** Metapoetry, William Butler Yeats, modernist poetry, self-reflexivity, automatic writing.

## Öz

Bu çalışmada, en sade haliyle şiir hakkında yazılan şiir olarak tanımlanabilecek metaşair kavramı çerçevesinde William Butler Yeats'in seçme eserleri incelenmiştir. İncelenen eserler arasında sırasıyla "The Balloon of The Mind," "Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931," "Adam's Curse," "The Circus Animals' Desertion," "Ego Dominus Tuus," "A Coat," "Meditation in Time of War" yer alırken, W.H. Auden'in Yeats'in anısına yazdığı "In Memory of W.B. Yeats" şiiri de bu bağlamda ele alınmıştır. Bu çalışma, metapoetik özdeşimselliği ve bunun Yeats'in şiirlerinde kendini nasıl gösterdiği üzerine odaklanırken, aynı zamanda şairin şiir yazma sürecinde karşısına çıkan psikografiye dair izler de irdelenmiştir. Yeats'in metapoetik unsurları kullanarak şiirin kendi doğasına ve yaratım sürecine dair yaptığı sorgulamalar, bu metinlerde geleneksel şiir anlayışı ile yenilikçi bakış açıları arasındaki gerilimi gözler önüne sermektedir. Çalışmada ayrıca, metaşairlerin yalnızca belirgin metapoetik eserlerde değil, daha sıradan şiirlerde bile nasıl ortaya çıkabileceği, Yeats'in bu kavrama verdiği önemle birlikte incelenmiştir. Bu sayede, metapoetik temaların, şiirin kendini sorgulama gücünü ve yaratıcı sürecin özüne dair derinlemesine bir anlayış sunduğu vurgulanmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelime:** Metaşair, William Butler Yeats, modernist şiir, özdeşimsellik, psikografi.

## Introduction

Metapoetry, in its most straightforward definition, refers to poetry that reflects on the nature of poetry itself. Such self-referential lines often utilise wordplay or wit to comment on the act of poetic creation or composition. However, its scope is not limited to the writing process; it also encompasses the stylistic features of poetry, as well as criticism on or parodies of earlier poetic traditions or individual poets. Metapoetry frequently articulates insights about its own essence as a poem or the literary tradition with which it engages. These covert statements often remain unnoticed by readers unfamiliar with the concept of metapoetry. Nevertheless, when approached with the appropriate awareness and interpretive lens, metapoetry can reveal an entirely new dimension of meaning.

In *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, Patricia Waugh asserts that “[b]y studying metafiction, one is, in effect, studying that which gives the novel its identity” (1984, p. 5). When this assertion is adapted to poetry, it becomes “[b]y studying metapoetry, one is, in effect, studying that which gives the poem its identity.” When looked through this lens, metapoetry’s capacity to question its own form and function becomes increasingly evident. Such self-examination is frequently conveyed through language that emphasizes introspection. Additionally, the definition of metapoetry often relies on adjectives prefixed with “self,” such as self-aware, self-oriented, self-reflexive, self-conscious, and self-referential—describing poetry that examines itself or the act of poetic composition. The self-reflexive nature of metapoetry has inevitably been a central focus of scholarly discussions. Alfred Weber relates the concept of self-reflexivity to poet’s intention as follows:

“[T]he genre of self-reflexive poetry [...] denotes the poem’s treatment of at least one aspect of the author’s theory, or poetics, as its primary and overt thematic concern. This thematic genre includes all poems that deal with the poet (his position and function in the culture and society of his time), with the writing of poetry (the creative process and the problems of language), and/or with the poem (the work of art, its structure and its quality)” (1997, p. 10).

In other words, the main theme and prominent subject of all self-reflexive poems are likely to be related to the poet’s poetics. Thus, the poet’s role in society, the creative process, and the structural or aesthetic dimensions of poetry emerge as key aspects in metapoetry. Beside Weber, other critics have also explored self-reflexivity in poetry. Müller-Zettelmann, for instance, refers to self-reflexivity as “literary auto reflexivity” and posits it as “an attractive alternative to the hetero-referential and mimetic tradition” (2005, p. 126). As such, he introduces the dichotomy of self-reflexivity and hetero-referentiality in literature. In hetero-referential poetry, the focus is on external world and events rather than the poem itself. Hetero-referential poetry seeks to imitate the real life and attempt to adhere to a realistic mindset and tradition, unlike the metaphorical orientation of metapoetry. This distinction makes self-reflexive literature a meta-approach, prioritising the exploration of the medium itself over the representation of external realities.

While the self-reflexivity of metapoetry is often regarded as its defining characteristic, reducing metapoetry to self-reflexivity alone, according to Müller-Zettelmann, is a fundamental fallacy. He contends that some metapoems emphasize allusions to other fictional texts, collections of literary works, or aesthetic concerns rather than focusing exclusively on self-reflection. Lyric sub-categories in metapoetry are defined based on whether there is any direct or indirect mention of the

work's fictional or artistic nature (2005, p. 129). This suggests that metapoetry is not confined to self-reflexivity; rather, it is merely one facet of a broader framework. In addition to self-reflexivity, metapoetry examines a wide range of elements, such as engaging with the fictional or constructed nature of aesthetic objects, exploring the nature of poetic language and creation, and questioning the role of the poet. Poets tend to write about various dimensions in their work, including their profession, experiences, and creative processes; what they have believed to be the uniqueness of poetic language; interpretation of their own works; their responses to the works of other poets, reflections on social or national events; how they define themselves in relation to culture and contemporary norms; and the evolution of their public image (Juvan, 2023, p. 7). Collectively, all these aspects are part of metapoetry and contribute to its nature.

It could be argued that it is inevitable for poets to reflect aspects of themselves or their inner world in their fictional works. In line with this, Casas advocates “a metapoetic projection” present in all literary works, suggesting that metapoetic elements may appear in specific segments of a literary work. Metapoetry, thus, might emerge in specific expressions within the interaction of multiple texts, even if each individual text is not inherently metapoetic (2011, p. 6). Jenaro Talens narrows this to poetry, claiming, “metapoetry does not exist, or else poetry does not exist: they are one and the same” (2000, p. 266). He further argues that all poetry is, in essence, metapoetry. This perspective is supported by Jansco's statement: “A metapoem is ‘consubstantial’ with its subject matter, poetry. The importance that poets attach to specific metapoems indicates that they themselves regard metapoetry as the most appropriate expression of their poetics” (2019, p. 10). It indicates that a poem as a production and the concept of poetry are inseparable. Essentially, metapoetry serves as a direct conduit for the poets' in-depth investigation of their own language, creative process, and commitment to their art. This demonstrates that the poets' identities and their artistic output are strongly complementary, establishing metapoetry as a vital and often definitive manifesto of their poetics.

In literature, if any movement is associated with adjectives beginning with “self,” it is undoubtedly modernism. It is significant to note that adjectives, often used to define self-reflexive poetry, are also closely tied to modernism itself. In *Twentieth-Century Metapoetry and the Lyric Tradition*, Daniella Jansco delves into this connection, justifying “metapoetry as the specific sub-genre of twentieth-century poetry” (2019, p. 11). She argues that metapoems tend to challenge traditional literary classifications, particularly by questioning the boundaries between Romanticism and Modernism, as well as between Modernism and Postmodernism. Modernist metapoems are deeply connected to the lyric tradition, particularly with Romanticism (p. 7, 16). Metapoetry intertwines the language of poetry with aesthetic thought and Romantic ideology, which is in line with metapoetry's such definition as “lyrical works that refer in some way to their existence as artistic constructs and those which include an evaluation or examination of poetry” (Mascia, 2001, p. 51). Juvan also identifies romantic literature as deeply engaged with self-reflection, leading to the creation of “a hybrid theoretical-literary genre of metapoetry” (2023, p. 7). It indicates how metapoetry bridges the concerns of Romantic self-reflection with the modernist exploration of form and function.

The various definitions and explanations provided by the critics mentioned thus far could point to the figure of William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), described as the “archaic modernist, innovative traditionalist, and populist elitist” (O'Connor, 2014, p. 80). This study aims to present Yeats and

elements/instances of metapoetry in his selected words, even some involving a particular focus on automatic (spiritual) writing. While automatic writing appears to emphasize spontaneity, metapoetry highlights deliberate artistic construction. This tension could reveal Yeats' unique way of integrating the unconscious creative process with conscious poetic skills, reflecting his broader aesthetic of reconciling contradictions. The poems to be analysed in the paper are as follows: "The Balloon of The Mind," "Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931," "Adam's Curse," "The Circus Animals' Desertion," "Ego Dominus Tuus," "A Coat," "Meditation in Time of War" by Yeats, and finally, W.H. Auden's "In Memory of W.B. Yeats." It is crucial to note that not all of the poems will be examined as metapoetry in their entirety. Some poems will provide only isolated instances of metapoetry within certain stanzas or lines. Through textual examples, the paper aims to uncover examples of metapoetry in Yeats' poetry and demonstrate that even random poems may contain elements of metapoetic expression.

### **Elements of Metapoetry in Selected Works of W.B. Yeats**

W.B. Yeats comments on the process of writing or composing poetry, asserting that "[w]e make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry" (1959, p. 331). This assertion highlights the reciprocal relationship between poets and their work: the poet shapes the poetry, while the poetry, in turn, influences the poet. In this context, it becomes unavoidable for poets to embed messages or implications about the writing process of poetry in their verses. Yeats' poetry often explores universal themes and archetypes, uses symbolism and elements of mythology, engages with historical and political events with a departure from the conventional forms and subject matter of traditional poetry. It further contains fragmented structures, enigmatic language, and experimental imagery (Hasan, 2023, p. 184). Yeats regarded metaphysical questions about art and existence as unavoidable, comparing them to shadows that follow the matter. He believed that by pursuing his instincts to the limits, he could confront the profound questions that shape both art and history. In doing so, Yeats engaged with the fundamental forces that shape not only creative expression but also the course of human history. His work reflects a constant exploration of these themes, where personal intuition meets broader philosophical and spiritual concerns (Oser, 2007, p. 34-35). In a similar vein, Pietrzak propounds that the individuality of the modernist artist stems from a serious and rigorous approach to literature, as well as a deliberate intention to maintain distance or detachment. Yeats serves as a key example of this approach (2011, p. 8).

The symbolism and metaphysical roots of Yeats' poetry can be traced back to William Blake's influence on him. According to Yeats, Blake was the first modern writer to emphasize that symbolism is inseparable from great art (1903, p. 177). This might also be indicative of Yeats' tendency to integrate symbols into his poetry. He claimed to experience visions, and it was through these visions that symbols were revealed to him. He even practiced "automatic writing", an occult practice, parallel to his interest in theosophy (Maxwell, 1977, p. 27). He actively took part in séances, spirit manipulations, and evocations, mirroring his immersion in occult beliefs and theurgical rituals (Surette, 1993, p. 6, 23). As Thompson observes, "[t]his automatic hand can neither think nor represent, but rather only write, inscribe, trace, record" (2004, p. 2). Orage elaborates on this notion of poetic inspiration as follows: "When you read Mr Yeats, are you not aware of a voice that is not his own, but another's speaking and acting through him?" (1916, p. 276) Namely, during automatic writing, spirits interact with the physical world by suspending the conscious control of the body and limbs, leaving only the hand to transcribe the words spoken by the voices.

It is well-documented that Yeats and his wife Georgiana Hyde-Lees began conducting sessions of automatic writing shortly after their marriage on October 20, 1917. Yeats himself acknowledged this practice in the introduction to the second edition of *A Vision* (1937), a book which elaborates on the complex exploration of mystical philosophy, historical cycles, and esoteric symbolism, mirroring Yeats' fascination with the occult, metaphysics, and spirituality:

“On the afternoon of October 24<sup>th</sup> 1917, four days after my marriage, my wife surprised me by attempting automatic writing. What came in disjointed sentences, in almost illegible writing, was so exciting, sometimes so profound, that I persuaded her to give an hour or two day after day to the unknown writer, and after some half-dozen such hours offered to spend what remained of life explaining and piecing together those scattered sentences. “No,” was the answer, “we have come to give you metaphors for poetry” (Yeats, 1966, p. 8).

The meaning derived from the spoken words by the spirits could suggest the self-reflexivity of poetry, where the act of writing becomes an expression of the creative process itself. Initially, the phrase “metaphors for poetry” can be interpreted as metaphors in the traditional sense: figures of speech that represent something beyond their literal meaning. However, an alternative interpretation might focus on metaphors that refer directly to the act of writing poetry, thereby transforming the result into metapoetry—poetry that reflects on its own creation. In *Encyclopedia of Occultism & Parapsychology*, automatic writing is described as “nothing more than a revivifying of faded mental imagery, thoughts and conjectures and impressions which never came to birth in the upper consciousness” (Shepard, 1984, p. 108), which resembles the metaphor as a figure of speech, as both involve the reawakening of thoughts or reimagining of images that were not fully realized in the conscious mind. In this way, automatic writing can be seen as a process that mirrors the creation of metaphors, where the unconscious mind brings forth latent ideas into conscious expression, reflecting the self-reflexivity inherent in metapoetry.

One poem by Yeats that can be interpreted as addressing automatic writing is “The Ballon of the Mind,” which consists of a single isometric rhymed quatrain:

“Hands, do what you’re bid:  
Bring the balloon of the mind  
That bellies and drags in the wind  
Into its narrow shed.”

The poem can be regarded as metapoetry, reflecting on the creative process of writing by using the balloon as a metaphor for the thoughts and ideas conveyed through poetry, while the shed symbolises the physical form of poetry, such as words on paper. The shed, in this context, may represent a book or a sheet of paper, as both are made from similar raw materials. Yeats uses metaphors about poetry within poetry, commanding his hands to “do what you’re bid,” reminiscent of the automatic writing process where the poet sits passively, awaiting visions or spiritual inspiration to guide his movements. However, as Terence Cave notes, such interpretation does not go beyond assuming the poet’s intents (2016, p. 33). Perhaps this is an inherent flaw of metapoetry, as readers often interpret the lines as exclusively referring to the act of writing poetry.

Yeats was notably influenced by the works of William Blake and Percy Bysshe Shelley, the former being a pre-Romantic, and the latter a leading figure of Romanticism. Yeats never iden-

tified himself as a modernist poet. Similar to other Romantic poets, he mostly adopted his symbols from philosophy, metaphysics, occult, magic, paintings and drawings, and Irish folklore and mythology. While he began his literary career as a Romantic poet, his work evolved over time, embodying characteristics of modernism, even if he did not explicitly acknowledge the label. In his poetry, his overwhelming use of symbols, as he states, give “dumb things voices, and bodiless things bodies” (Yeats, 1903, p. 227) is an indicator of this transition from romantic concerns to modernist ones. He refers to himself and his contemporaries as “the last romantics” in his poem “Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931.” In the last stanza of the poem, Yeats writes,

“We were the last romantics - chose for theme  
Traditional sanctity and loveliness;  
Whatever’s written in what poets name  
The book of the people; whatever most can bless  
The mind of man or elevate a rhyme;  
But all is changed, that high horse riderless,  
Though mounted in that saddle Homer rode  
Where the swan drifts upon a darkening flood.”

The stanza can be considered an instance of metapoetry, as it references the poet’s literary tradition, particularly identifying himself with romanticism and the choice of traditional themes. It thereby demonstrates a self-awareness of the poet’s position within the literary tradition. Additionally, it alludes to other literary figures, such as the poet Homer. Within the stanza, there is a contrast between traditional poetry and the contemporary poetry of Yeats’ time, emphasised in the line “all is changed”, symbolizing the loss of an era where poetry had a particular structure and function. It further illustrates the nostalgia for the Romantic poetry and also classical poetic tradition, and it functions as a tool to mirror how past traditions still have an influence on the poet’s current poetic expression. Like the other stanzas in the poem, this particular one consists of rhyming lines, subtly positioning Yeats as a critic of free verse, which often lacks formal restrictions, meter, and a rhyme scheme. In the final line, Yeats employs a powerful imagery symbolising his struggle with the changing tides of literature and his place within it. Thus, the swan could be seen as a metaphor for Yeats himself.

Another poem that incorporates elements of metapoetry is “Adam’s Curse.” Written in the form of a conversation, the poem’s rhythm can be described as “languid and pensive” (Stubbings, 2000, p. 57), and it is recalled through the speaker’s memories. The ostensible address to the work of the poet in the poem is salient when the speaker recalls a memory of a summer sitting with a lover and her close friend:

“And you and I, and talked of poetry.  
I said, ‘A line will take us hours maybe;  
Yet if it does not seem a moment’s thought,  
Our stitching and unstitching has been naught.”

The line “A line will take us hours maybe” highlights the effort and meticulous attention required to compose a single line, emphasising the dedication and toil inherent in the poetic pro-

cess. The observation “Yet if it does not seem a moment’s thought” reveals the paradox of poetry: despite the effort, good poetry must appear spontaneous and natural, a characteristic of Romantic poetry. It also corresponds to the revelations experienced during the process of automatic writing. This self-aware commentary implicates the tension between the visible labour of the poet and the desired impression of ease. The conversational tone mirrors the shared experience of analysing and discussing poetry, further engaging with metapoetry as a theme. As in the last line above, poetry involves “stitching and unstitching” as in putting words together or changing the order to convey messages or emotions to the reader. Yeats achieves this through the deliberate use of rhyme schemes, which add structure and musicality to his verse.

In the following part of the same stanza, it is noteworthy that the speaker highlights how the other people with different professions (cleaner, miner, etc.) perceive poets as less important and serious. The speaking persona, defending poets, responds as follows:

“For to articulate sweet sounds together  
Is to work harder than all these, and yet  
Be thought an idler by the noisy set  
Of bankers, schoolmasters, and clergymen.”

These lines also suggest that writing poetry requires immense intellectual and emotional investment. The phrase “to articulate sweet sounds together” metaphorically describes the creation of poetry and signals the harmony between words and aesthetically pleasing verses. By addressing the effort and societal perception of poetry within the poem itself, Yeats engages in self-reflection, a key feature of metapoetry, making this a commentary on the poet’s struggles to balance artistic creation with external judgments. Much like in “Adam’s Curse”, where Yeats describes the tremendous effort involved in writing poetry perceived by others as “an idle trade,” “The Circus Animals’ Desertion” similarly puts emphasis on the labour behind the art form. Both poems portray the effort to compose poetry as a romanticized yet burdensome task, revealing the poet’s awareness of the work’s perceived futility in a world that fails to appreciate the depth of its intellectual and emotional cost.

In “The Circus Animals’ Desertion”, Yeats’ exploration of artistic toil is intertwined with a sense of disillusionment. The poet revisits his “masterful images,” critiquing them for their artificiality and acknowledging that they originated not from divine inspiration but from the “rag and bone shop of the heart” in the following lines:

“Those masterful images because complete  
Grew in pure mind but out of what began?  
[...]  
... Now that my ladder’s gone  
I must lie down where all the ladders start  
In the foul rag and bone shop of the heart.”

The earlier glorification of hard work in “Adam’s Curse” leads to a more tempered acceptance of imperfection and emotional honesty. The labour that once seemed heroic now appears fraught with futility, yet it is this very rawness that paves the way for artistic renewal. Jansco refers to

“The Circus Animals’ Desertion” (1939) as “a mini-drama in three acts about a poet’s struggle to regain his creativity” (2019, p. 44). Although the poem makes allusions to the process of drama writing, especially how Yeats came up with the idea of writing his verse drama *The Countess Cathleen*, it contains elements of metapoetry. The initial lines tell the challenging process of generating a new idea: “I sought a theme and sought for it in vain, / I sought it daily for six weeks or so.” In stanza 2, he desperately asks “What can I but enumerate old themes”, suggesting he cannot unbind his ties with the poetry tradition preceding his day. The poem might critique Yeats’ earlier works while celebrating the power of embracing raw, emotional truths that go beyond the elaborate imagery of the past. “The Circus Animals’ Desertion” thus stands as a metapoetic work, examining the nature of poetic creation, the limits of artistic artifice, and the need to return to the “heart” as the true source of creativity. Through self-reflection, Yeats explores both the vulnerability and strength involved in the creative process, making the poem a profound meditation on the complexities of writing poetry.

In another poem, the necessity of returning to the heart as the true wellspring of creativity is also highlighted. “Ego Dominus Tuus” (1917), Latin for “I am your Lord”, is drawn from Dante’s *La Vita Nuova* where the phrase is spoken to Dante in a dream by the personification of love. The poem incorporates metapoetic elements, exploring the nature of poetic creation, inspiration, and the purpose of art. “Ego Dominus Tuus” is structured as a dialogue or debate between two characters with Latin names *Hic* and *Ille*, meaning “this” and “that,” respectively. *Hic*, the pragmatic and conventional figure, argues that literature should reflect the artist’s personal life, while *Ille*, whom Ezra Pound believed to represent Yeats himself, believes that art should transcend the artist’s life experiences, representing an idealized vision (Hirschberg, 1975, p. 129). Through this debate, Yeats questions the relationship between personal experience and artistic creation, a core aspect of metapoetry.

“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.  
 Ille. Because I seek an image, not a book.  
 Those men that in their writings are most wise,  
 Own nothing but their blind, stupefied hearts.”

The contrast in the above excerpt offers two different approaches to poetry: the imitation of classical masters versus the pursuit of a more elusive and profound “image,” a characteristic of modernist poetry that echoes Ezra Pound’s motto: “Make it new”. Similar to the previous poems in this study, the tension is an indicator of the clash between the traditional versus experimental, modernist poetry. Pound’s association of *Ille* with Yeats is plausible, as *Ille*’s assertion that he “seeks an image, not a book” challenges the notion that poetry derives solely from learned tradition. Moreover, *Ille*’s line, “Those men that in their writings are most wise, / Own nothing but their blind, stupefied hearts,” critiques poets who rely solely on intellectuality, suggesting that wisdom devoid of emotional depth or visionary insight leads to hollow poetry. It further alludes to the process of automatic writing, wherein the poet receives visions. This dialogic form is itself a metapoetic



device, foregrounding the process of artistic deliberation and the inner conflict between tradition and innovation. In the poem, the lines “Whether we have chosen chisel, pen or brush / We are but critics, or but half create” demonstrate the universality of artistic creation, another central concern in metapoetry. The phrase “we are but critics” implies that artists engage in a process of interpreting, refining, and reshaping the raw material of their inspiration rather than purely originating it. Conversely, the phrase “but half create” acknowledges the inherent limitations of the artist: the work is never entirely original or complete. It is only an imitation or mimesis. This highlights the collaborative nature of creation, where the artist draws from external influences (nature, symbols, culture, experiences), and the audience plays a role in completing the meaning. This corresponds to modernist themes of fragmentation and the impossibility of capturing the full or complete meaning of a poem. Instead, the reader can only attempt to discern the mind and intent of the poet. Furthermore, Yeats rejects the “painted stage” and “masterful images” of his earlier works, recognizing that true poetic inspiration lies not in mythological grandeur but in the unadorned truths of the heart. Similarly, in “A Coat”, Yeats critiques his own early reliance on “embroideries / Out of old mythologies,” rejecting them as overly ornate and subject to misinterpretation: “I made my song a coat/Covered with embroideries/Out of old mythologies.” By choosing to “walk naked” at the end of the poem, he adopts a simpler, more authentic poetic voice. The metaphor of the song is of significance because Yeats’ poetry is primarily lyrical and rhymed, as seen in the poem itself. The metaphor of the “coat” then represents Yeats’ poetry—his crafted works, “covered with embroideries” drawn from “old mythologies.” This is a metapoetic acknowledgment of the materials and inspirations that shape his poetic voice, particularly his use of Irish myth and cultural tradition. The coat becomes a symbol of the poet’s self-presentation to the world.

Moreover, the poem can be linked to Blake’s influence on Yeats, particularly through Blake’s musical writing and his collection *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. Blake’s connection to songs is not just in the title of his works but in the very nature of his art, which blends word, rhythm, and image in ways that evoke the universality and power of music. Yeats laments that the “fools” have “caught it” and “wore it in the world’s eyes as though they’d wrought it,” which expresses his frustration with how his work has been misunderstood or trivialized by his audience. Likewise, by stating “let them take it,” Yeats abandons the ownership of his earlier poetic works, recognizing that once poetry is shared, it no longer solely belongs to the creator, resembling Roland Barthes’ concept of the “Death of the Author” propounded in his namesake essay (1977). This reflects a metapoetic aspect: the poets’ authority over their work diminishes once it is introduced to the public sphere. The closing lines point to renewal and transformation, as Yeats discards the “coat,” signalling his readiness to embark on a new phase of poetic creation. It demonstrates his confidence in the ability to create something new, free from the constraints of previous styles or external expectations.

Another brief poem by Yeats that can be interpreted as metapoetry is “Meditation in Time of War”:

“For one throb of the artery,  
While on that old grey stone I sat  
Under the old wind-broken tree,  
I knew that One is animate

Mankind inanimate phantasy.”

In the poem, the “throb of the artery” signifies a brief moment of profound awareness, a meta-poetic realization of the transient source of creativity—the “One” that animates. Such epiphanic moments are often central to poetic inspiration, revealing a higher truth beyond the material world as during a meditation. The distinction between the “One” as animate and “Mankind” as “inanimate phantasy” suggests a critique of humanity’s detachment from the spiritual or eternal. This also indicates the poet’s unique role: while others remain entangled in the mundane, the poet channels the “One” into creative expression through imagination.

It further demonstrates the artist’s ability to access and articulate profound truths. The “old grey stone” and “old wind-broken tree” evoke timeless images of nature, which might serve as sources of poetic inspiration in Yeats’ work. These images connect personal, spiritual insight to the broader artistic tradition, reinforcing the meta-poetic idea that poetry arises from the interplay between the individual and the eternal. By recognizing the “One” as animate and mankind as an “inanimate phantasy,” Yeats presents the poet as a mediator between the eternal and the temporal realms. The meta-poetic implication here is that poetry serves as a bridge, channelling the vitality of the “One” into the otherwise static realm of human existence. The phrase “inanimate phantasy” suggests that much of human creation, including art and literature, lacks the true vitality of the “One.” This introduces a meta-poetic tension: how can poetry, as a human construct, aspire to breathe life into the inanimate? This conflict reflects Yeats’ ongoing exploration of art’s role in expressing and disclosing eternal truths.

The final instance of meta-poetry in this study is W.H. Auden’s “In Memory of W.B. Yeats,” which mourns the loss of Yeats while contemplating the enduring power of poetry. The poem consists of three parts. In the first section, Auden asserts that Yeats’ words will continue to influence the living, as stated in “[t]he words of a dead man / Are modified in the guts of the living”. This highlights the idea that poetry transcends its creator, becoming part of the collective consciousness. The second section expands this idea, acknowledging poetry’s immortality despite its creator’s death. Auden paradoxically suggests that Yeats, though “silly” and like any other man, possessed a “gift” that transcended time, because “poetry makes nothing happen: it survives.” It is noteworthy to mention that the rhyme in the first and second parts of the poem are inconsistent; however, it is perfectly rhymed in the last section, where Auden advises poets to continue guiding the nation with their words, saying “With your unconstraining voice / Still persuade us to rejoice.” This final segment reinforces the meta-poetic idea that poetry, beyond its creator’s lifetime, holds an active role in shaping and guiding society.

## Conclusion

Meta-poetry can manifest itself in many forms, often in surprising, unexpected, unconventional verses or lines. In such parts, the poet reflects on or refers to the process of writing poetry, often acknowledging its own nature or the act of creation itself. The poem self-reflexively engages with its own form, structure, and purpose, prompting the reader to recognize that they are interacting with a work that examines the very nature of poetry itself. This study has explored some of Yeats’ lesser-known poems that incorporate meta-poetic elements. Automatic or spiritual writing, of which Yeats and his wife were fond, is also reflected in some of these poems. In “The Balloon of The Mind,” automatic writing is depicted similarly to a session where only the hand moves without

conscious control. In “Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931,” Yeats, who often struggled with balancing his romantic ideals with modernist developments in literature, expresses how he perceives himself as a Romantic poet in the era of the modernists. “Adam’s Curse” focuses on how poetry is received by others. The persona emphasizes the difficulty of being a poet, showing how poetry is undervalued by traditional professions and highlighting the hard work involved in creating good poetry despite external criticism. In “The Circus Animals’ Desertion,” the toil of art is revisited, with the suggestion that old traditions in poetry should be replaced by experimental approaches, a similar message conveyed in “Adam’s Curse.” “Ego Dominus Tuus” is structured as a dialogue between two personas debating traditional versus experimental writing. In “A Coat,” Yeats critiques his earlier poetry, where he adhered to traditional forms. In “Meditation in Time of War,” Yeats presents a moment of profound awareness in which the “One” symbolizes a transcendent source of creativity, with the poet serving as a mediator between the spiritual and the temporal, while simultaneously critiquing humanity’s estrangement from divine or transformative sources of inspiration. Finally, though not written by Yeats, W.H. Auden’s “In Memory of W.B. Yeats” is indeed metapoetic in nature, mirroring Yeats’ legacy and how poetry surpasses its creator. The inclusion of Auden’s poem is functional in that it meditates on the enduring power of Yeats’ poetry beyond his death. All in all, it can be concluded that instances of metapoetry may exist in works that do not immediately appear to embody such characteristics. In this way, Yeats’ exploration of metapoetic themes uncovers the subtle yet profound ways in which poetry can explore its own creation, blurring the boundaries between artistic expression and self-awareness.

### Geniřletilmiř zet

Bu alıřma, metařair kavramı erevesinde William Butler Yeats’in seme eserlerini incelemeyi amalamaktadır. Metařair, en sade haliyle, řairin kendi yaratım srecine, doėasına ve biimine dair bir zdřnmsellik barındırarak kendine atıfta bulunmasıdır. Yeats’in bu tr řairleri, geleneksel řair anlayıřını ařarak, řairin kendisini sorgulayan bir yaklařım sergilemektedir. alıřmada incelenen eserler sırasıyla “The Balloon of The Mind,” “Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931,” “Adam’s Curse,” “The Circus Animals’ Desertion,” “Ego Dominus Tuus,” “A Coat,” “Meditation in Time of War” olarak sıralanıırken, W.H. Auden’in Yeats’in anısına yazdıėı “In Memory of W.B. Yeats” adlı řair de metařair aısından ele alınan bir diėer nemli eserdir.

Yeats’in metapoetik eserlerinde řair hakkında yapılan zdřnmsel sorgulamalar hem řairin bireysel yaratım srecini hem de genel anlamda řairin toplumdaki yeri ve deėeriyle ilgili daha geniř soruları ele almaktadır. zellikle metapoetik bir yapıya sahip olan “The Balloon of The Mind,” řairsel ifadenin bilinli bir kontrol olmaksızın, otomatik bir řekilde aktıėı bir yazım srecini, psikografyi, tasvir etmektedir. Bu tr yazılar, yazma srecinin spontane doėasını yansıtarak, řairin bilinli dřnceye dayalı yaratım srecini ařan bir biimde yazmayı hedeflediėini ortaya koymaktadır. Yeats, burada, řairsel yaratımın bilin dıřı bir sre olabileceėini vurgulayarak, řairin geleneksel sınırlarını zorlamaktadır.

“Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931” adlı řair, Yeats’in modernizm ve romantizm arasındaki gerilimli dinamiėinin bir yansımasıdır. Yeats řairde kendisini romantik bir řair olarak ve edebiyattaki modernist akımın etkisi altındaki bir dnemde konumlandırır. Bu řair, řairin gemiřteki řair anlayıřını modernist edebiyatın etkisiyle yeniden sorguladıėı bir metin olarak dikkat eker. Burada, Yeats’in metapoetik bir yaklařım benimseyerek, řairinin tarihsel baėlamını tartıřmaya aması, řair ile edebi gelenek arasındaki iliřkiye dair nemli bir sorgulama ortaya koyar.

“Adam’s Curse” ise řiirsel üretim ile toplumun řiirsel üretime bakışı arasındaki çekişmeyi konu alır. řair, řiirin deęerinin genellikle göz ardı edildiğini ve toplum tarafından dışlanan bir sanat dalı olarak kabul edildiğini ifade eder. Burada Yeats, řiirsel bir zanaat olarak řiirin zorluklarını ve bunun bireysel yaratım sürecindeki yansımaları ele alırken, aynı zamanda řiirin kültürel ve sosyal bağlamda nasıl algılandığına dair eleştirilerde bulunur. Bu metin, metapoetik bir özellik taşıyarak, řiirin kendisine yapılan eleştirileri ve řiirin dış dünyadan aldığı tepkiyi sorgulayarak gözler önüne serer.

“The Circus Animals’ Desertion” řiirinde ise Yeats, geçmişin geleneksel řiirsel biçimlerini terk ederek, daha yenilikçi ve deneysel bir bakış açısı benimsemenin gerekliliğini ifade eder. Bu řiir, sanatın ve edebiyatın, özellikle de řiirin, yalnızca belirli kalıplarda var olmaması gerektiğini vurgular. Yeats, burada, řiirsel yaratım sürecinin bir tür özgürleşme olduğunu dile getirirken, aynı zamanda geçmişin yüklerinden sıyrılarak yeni yollar keşfetmenin önemine değinir.

“Ego Dominus Tuus,” iki farklı kişiliğin, geleneksel řiir anlayışı ile yenilikçi řiir anlayışı arasında bir diyalog kurarak, metapoetik bir tartışma başlatır. Burada řair, iki farklı bakış açısını temsil eden seslerin karşılıklı bir şekilde řiir üzerinde konuşmalarını sağlar. Bu řiir, metapoetik bir tartışma olarak, řiirin biçimi ve içeriği üzerine derinlemesine bir inceleme sunar. Bu tür bir diyalog, Yeats’in řiir anlayışındaki dönüşümü ve onun edebi dünyasında ortaya çıkan farklı yönelimleri gösterir.

“A Coat” adlı řiir ise Yeats’in daha önce yazdığı geleneksel řiirleri eleştirdiği bir metin olarak öne çıkar. Burada Yeats, geçmişteki řiir anlayışını terk eder ve řiirsel dilin yenilenmesi gerektiğini savunur. řiirin kendini sorgulaması, yalnızca bir biçimsel yenilik değil, aynı zamanda anlam ve içerik düzeyinde de bir dönüşümü ifade eder.

“Meditation in Time of War,” řairin savaş zamanındaki ruh halini yansıtırken, aynı zamanda bir tür manevi arayışa ve řiirin ruhsal bir içsel keşif aracı olarak işlevine odaklanır. Bu řiir, řairin yaratıcı sürecini, insanlık durumunu ve dünyadaki karanlık zamanları birleştirerek, řiirin metafiziksel boyutlarını keşfeder. Yeats bu řiirde řiirsel yaratımın yalnızca bireysel bir ifade biçimi değil, aynı zamanda insanlıkla ilgili derinlemesine bir düşünsel ve spiritüel arayış olduğunu ortaya koyar.

Son olarak, W.H. Auden’in “In Memory of W.B. Yeats” adlı řiiri, Yeats’in řiirsel mirasını ve onun ölümünden sonra řiirin nasıl bâki kaldığını ele alır. Auden, Yeats’in řiirinin ölümünden sonra bile yaşamaya devam ettiğini ve onun edebi mirasının zamanla nasıl evrildiğini vurgular. Auden’in bu metni, metapoetik bir nitelik taşır çünkü hem Yeats’in řiirine hem de řiirin genel olarak yaratıcı gücüne dair derinlemesine bir meditasyon sunar.

Sonuç olarak bu çalışma, Yeats’in metapoetik temalarla şekillendirdiği řiirlerinde, řiirin kendi doğası, yaratım süreci ve toplumsal işlevi hakkında önemli sorgulamalar yapıldığını göstermektedir. Yeats’in řiirsel yapıtları, yalnızca estetik anlamda değil, aynı zamanda řiirin içsel doğasına dair önemli bir düşünsel çerçeve sunmaktadır. Bu metinler, řairin geleneksel ve yenilikçi řiir anlayışları arasındaki gerilimi ve metapoetik sorgulamalarını derinlemesine gözler önüne sermektedir.

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