

W. B. Yeats's Early Poetics and the Revisions of 'The Madness of King Goll'

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Summary This study examines the five-stage revision of W. B. Yeats's early poem 'The Madness of King Goll' (1887), demonstrating how late nineteenth-century Irish cultural nationalism and European literary movements shaped its transformation. Although the poem underwent unusually extensive revisions from its first appearance in *The Leisure Hour* to its final form in the 1899 edition of *Poems*, it has attracted relatively little critical attention in recent Yeats scholarship.

In this work, Yeats explored one of his most enduring artistic concerns: how to retell Irish myth and legend in poetic form. He responded to contemporary literary contexts and to shifting demands of medium and readership by adopting diverse approaches across each version. Based in London during his early career, Yeats carefully negotiated the political and religious sensitivities of British readers while participating in Irish cultural nationalism and establishing his identity as a poet rooted in the Irish oral literary tradition. As he was revising the poem, his engagement with nationalism became more ambivalent, even as he absorbed the influence of French Symbolism and reshaped his poetics accordingly.

Originally conceived as a ballad mediating between history and legend, 'The Madness of King Goll' gradually evolved into a Symbolist poem grounded in Irish imaginative tradition. By tracing this transformation, the study reconsiders the development of Yeats's early poetics in the light of the cultural contexts of the 1880s and 1890s.

Keywords: W. B. Yeats, 'The Madness of King Goll', Irish cultural nationalism, Symbolism, poetic development

William Butler Yeats (1865–1939) pursued the poetic perfection of 'The Madness of King Goll' (1887) early in his career, at a time when his engagement with Irish myth and legend was undergoing significant transformation. As Peter McDonald observes, despite Yeats's sustained efforts to revise the poem, it 'has seldom been the subject of extended study in modern Yeats criticism', and is often interpreted through a biographical lens, with critics assuming that the protagonist is a veiled self-portrait of Yeats.¹⁾ Other critics have focused instead on iden-

tifying putative historical or literary sources behind Yeats's portrayal of Goll.²⁾ This tendency reflects a broader pattern in scholarship on Yeats's early poetry, in which biographical readings and source studies often underpin larger arguments about his development as a poet.³⁾ However, revision itself is central to that development: as David Holdeman notes, Yeats 'revised with the intention of perfecting his works and through them his selfhood', a practice that helped shape his works as an amalgam of his public persona and his aesthetics by refining his versification and

diction.⁴⁾ While the literary qualities of these early poems have remained largely underexplored, an analysis of their revising process can shed new light on Yeats's evolving poetics.

Between 1887 and 1899 Yeats produced five major versions of 'The Madness of King Goll', an unusually frequent pattern of revision in his career, publishing them in different venues and tailoring them to different groups of readers. These versions do more than record technical refinement: across them, we can trace distinct shifts in his aesthetic priorities, ideological stance, and engagement with readers.⁵⁾ These shifts were shaped by Yeats's transnational experiences. Though primarily based in London during this period, he engaged with literary movements across Europe, most notably the Irish Literary Revival and French Symbolism through key figures such as Arthur Symonds.⁶⁾ Each version is at once transitional and transnational, and thus captures his negotiation of competing artistic and cultural pressures.

This paper examines the major versions of 'The Madness of King Goll' in chronological order, with particular attention to the cultural-historical contexts that shaped the poem. The first version, published as 'King Goll: An Irish Legend' in *The Leisure Hour* (September 1887), reflects Yeats's early attempt to reconcile his cultural-nationalist interests with the expectations of English readers. The subsequent versions in *Poems and Ballads of Young Ireland* (1888) and *The Wanderings of Oisín and Other Poems* (1889) signal a shift towards a less political form of Celticism that privileges artistic autonomy over nationalist appeal. Although the 1888 anthology appealed to fervent Irish nationalism, Yeats's contribution suggests his resistance to the overt political modes often found in the writings of his contemporary Irish writers. The 1889 version continues this trajectory, drawing on a deepened knowledge of Irish mythology. This shift intensified in the later versions published in *Poems* (1895) and its 1899 reissue, where Yeats experiments with a Symbolist mode rooted in Irish myth and legend. By situating each version within his shift

toward aesthetic Celticism and foregrounding his negotiation with readers, this study argues that 'The Madness of King Goll' offers a compelling case for reassessing the literary and ideological complexity of Yeats's early verse. Rather than serving merely as a precursor to his mature works, the poem illuminates the artistic experimentation that shaped Yeats's early poetic identity.

1. The First Version as an Heir to the Irish Imaginative Tradition

In 'King Goll: An Irish Legend' (1887), Yeats introduced Irish legends as his theme, regarding them as being rooted in Ireland's longstanding imaginative tradition; this would become his characteristic mode of cultural nationalism. At the time he was a young Irish poet newly arrived in London, with connections to Irish nationalist writers and a growing interest in Irish folklore; he found in it a profound spirituality that he saw as cognate with esoteric ideas, which he already had been absorbed in. As his commitment to a spiritually inflected cultural nationalism grew, he began to incorporate a spiritual understanding of folklore into his poems. However, he published 'King Goll' in *The Leisure Hour*, a London periodical of 'Christian persuasion' aimed at general readers in England.⁷⁾ Although it remains unclear how he came to know the magazine's editors, Seán Hewitt suggests that Yeats sought to reach a metropolitan readership through this venue,⁸⁾ indicating that he strategically adapted his cultural nationalism in the periodical whose political and religious beliefs differed from his own.

Editorial caution was not the only factor shaping Yeats's approach. The literary quality of contemporary nationalist verse also prompted him to favour a cultural and spiritual nationalism, over that in the political mode. While he shared nationalist antipathy toward Victorian England, his disapproval was directed chiefly at the rationalism and utilitarianism that, in his view, underwrote that society. This philosophical distaste led him to reject much contem-

porary Irish nationalist poetry, which he regarded as marked by "[p]ropagandistic immediacy" and lacking "the 'imaginative energy'".⁹⁾ Distancing himself from political agitation, he found inspiration in retellings of Irish legend and myth, and came to view these works as heirs to the Irish oral tradition. This discovery encouraged him to imagine national identity grounded in spiritual and mythological inheritance.

Yeats framed 'King Goll: An Irish Legend' within this imaginative tradition by appending a preliminary note that emphasises the poem's ancient lineage:

Goll or Gall lived in Ireland about the third century. The battle wherein he lost his reason furnished matter for a bardic chronicle still extant. O'Curry, in his "Manuscript Materials of Irish History," thus tells the tale: "Having entered the battle with extreme eagerness, his excitement soon increased to absolute frenzy, and after having performed astounding deeds of valour he fled in a state of derangement from the scene of slaughter, and never stopped until he plunged into the wild seclusion of a deep glen far up the country. . . ." ¹⁰⁾

This note does more than create an exotic atmosphere or provide preliminaries for English readers: it situates the poem at the intersection of the bardic tradition and modern academic historiography. In doing so, Yeats underscores both the continuity of Irish literary tradition and its partial grounding in historical sources. At the same time, his ambiguous presentation of the protagonist's name signals the limits of historical reconstruction and his interest in the imaginative possibilities of myth.¹¹⁾ While this ambiguity has led some modern critics to claim that 'at this first published stage, 'King Goll' is far less dependent on any source (despite the note) than it is on WBY's imagination',¹²⁾ for Yeats poetic retelling, not necessarily with historical accuracy, offered a more authentic way of engaging with Irish materials, as his preceding Irish poets had done in the nineteenth century. In this respect, he

aligned himself with writers such as Ferguson and Allingham, whom he regarded as treating folklore not as antiquarian residue but as a living source for national literature.¹³⁾

Yeats believed that these poetic retellings—especially Irish balladry—were marked by 'simplicity and strength',¹⁴⁾ and he sought to realise these qualities in 'King Goll'. Although Irish writing in English was often indistinguishable from that of English writers,¹⁵⁾ he foregrounded the virtues of Irish ballads, that is, spontaneity, simplicity, sincerity, and a strong sense of community,¹⁶⁾ and set them against the elaborate metaphors of conventional Victorian verse.¹⁷⁾ In doing so, he presented Irish balladry as an alternative to what Victorian England offered to society.¹⁸⁾ Accordingly, narrating in Goll's first person and adopting a quasi-ballad style, Yeats avoids excessive embellishment and introduces Goll as 'a wise young king' (l. 1) in direct, simple diction:

I was a wise young king of old;
Mine was the throne in Eman's hall,
Of purple and of heavy gold;
And mine was every trophied wall,
The horns and shields and wild swan's pinions;
And with a rule serene and mild
I ruled o'er all my fair dominions,
A gentle yet a kingly child;
And every whispering Druid said,
Bending low his pious head,
'He brings the peaceful age of gold'—
(They will not hush, the leaves that round me
flutter—the beech leaves old). (ll. 1–12) ¹⁹⁾

Yeats employs several techniques to evoke the qualities of balladry, in which details fade as songs passed down through generations via oral tradition, yet strong rhythm, simple diction and folkloric atmosphere remain. His use of parallel syntax in lines 2 and 4 ('Mine was. . .', 'And mine was. . .') creates rhythmic cohesion. Although the catalogue of visual and material images surrounding the king are luxurious, it is

articulated in straightforward diction, such as throne 'of purple, and of heavy gold' (l. 3) and decorated wall with '[t]he horns and shields and wild swan's pinions' (l. 6). Yeats also tells the king's nobility through abstract yet simple diction such as 'serene and mild' (l. 6) and '[a] gentle yet a kingly child' (l. 8), while the Druids' reverence reinforces a pre-Christian atmosphere. In this way, despite the lavish images, the simple diction, rhythmic strength and pagan colouring together evoke what Yeats thought as the traditional Irish balladry.

At the same time, he is also aware of the balladry's potential 'baldness and a lack of [finish]'.²⁰⁾ To counterbalance this, he deploys the refrain in 'King Goll' as departing from the conventional use in ballads, where it often stands apart from a stanza's content. In each final line— '(They will not hush, the leaves that round me flutter—the beech leaves old)' (l. 12)—the rustling-leaves motif recurs, underscoring mood and theme through its evocative force which anticipates the Symbolist inflections of later versions. In the opening stanza, for instance, the Druids' whispering shades seamlessly into the rustling of leaves; both are faint, continuous sounds. Given that Goll is already mad when he narrates the poem (as suggested in the preliminary note), the refrain can also be read as an expression of auditory hallucination: his madness leads him to hear the fluttering leaves as an unrelenting, intrusive whisper. Thus, Yeats invests the refrain with interpretive ambiguity and a strong imaginative linkage to each stanza, thereby surmounting the potential shortcomings of traditional balladry.

Although his attempt to revive Irish literary tradition arose from Irish cultural nationalism—and in 1889, he would criticise some Irish writers for '[writing] ever with one eye on London', and aim to portray Ireland without sentimentality or stereotype²¹⁾—the poem also appealed to an English taste for the exotic. The use of specifically Irish terms, such as 'Eman' (l. 2) and 'Druid' (l. 9) aligned with what English readers expected for Irish poems. While sustaining this duality, the subsequent versions emphasise their artistic

autonomy over political appeal.

2. The Second and Third Versions: Towards a More Aesthetic Mode of Celticism

Yeats's reputation as an Irish poet rose among London literary circle, by the publication of *Poems and Ballads of Young Ireland* (1888) (hereafter *PBYI*), an anthology associated with the Young Ireland movement, and *The Wanderings of Oisín and Other Poems* (1889) (hereafter *WO*), his first collected edition.²²⁾ In these two volumes, Yeats sought a more refined engagement with Celticism through Irish landscapes and mythological learning, while distancing himself from overt political rhetoric and privileging imagination over ideology.

While *PBYI* proclaims its decolonial mission 'with voice and pen' (l. 2)²³⁾ and many contributions focus on political agitation and key moments of colonisation, Yeats's poems, though cultural nationalist in tone, deliberately avoid direct political advocacy. This divergence is evident in his retrospective review of *PBYI* in 1890: rather than stressing its political aspect, he valued it as 'adding another link, however small, to the long chain of Irish song that unites decade to decade'.²⁴⁾ Each of his contributions, 'The Stolen Child', 'King Goll', 'The Meditation of the Old Fisherman', and 'Love Song' draws on what he regarded as the genuine Irish oral tradition: folklore, legend, and song. Despite the prevalence of nationalist verse in the volume, Yeats foregrounded the Irish imaginative tradition, a tendency reflected in his revision of 'King Goll'.

This time, Yeats incorporated Irish landscape into the poem, regarding it as a part of literary tradition in Ireland, and thus associated it with his poetics. This association appears in a letter to Katharine Tynan, one of the editors of *PBYI*, written in May 1888, where he praised her depiction of 'rich arable land such as lies about your own house' and criticised passages that 'spoiled the simplicity',²⁵⁾ falling into the merely picturesque.²⁶⁾ This view stems from the same pre-

ference for simple diction evident in the 1887 version and from his philosophical distaste for Victorian England. Now, his taste is transposed into poetics on landscape: if familiar landscapes are connected to Irish legends, portraying them without ornateness enriches poetry. In line with this conviction, he avoided 'the strange and rare and glittering scenes',²⁷⁾ revising 'King Goll' to evoke a more grounded sense of ancient Ireland:

Mine was a chair of skins and gold,
Wolf-breeding mountains, galleried Eman,
And streams, wide-watering, salmon shoaled,
Many a landsman, many a seaman.
Chaired in the cushioned otter skin,
Fields fattening slow, men wise in joy,
I ruled and ruled my life within—
A gracious, gentle, kingly boy.
And every mumbling old man said,
Bending low his fading head,
'This young man brings the age of gold'—
(They will not hush, the leaves a-flutter round
me—the beech-leaves old). (ll. 1–12)

This landscape is neither picturesque nor artificial; rather, it evokes the folkloric image of an ancient Irish kingdom through fertile natural elements, such as 'streams, wide-watering, salmon shoaled' (l. 3). Nature appears not only as a source of prosperity but also as a protective force, encircling the land with '[w]olf-breeding mountains' (l. 2). Abundant wildlife coexists with enduring rural communities, embodied in the figures of 'a landsman' and 'a seaman', both described as 'wise in joy' (l. 4, 6). These integrated, organic images of the kingdom contrast sharply with the decorative opulence of Goll's throne in the 1887 version, with its gilded seat and martial trophies, imagery that Yeats would later criticise for 'sacrific[ing] all things to colour'.²⁸⁾ Whereas the earlier version's lexical simplicity serves decorative display, the 1888 text privileges the depiction of the Irish landscape without ornamentation.

Yet this landscape poetics did not preclude the use of sophisticated technique. Compared with the first version, the 1888 text more deliberately juxtaposes Goll's sanity in the opening stanzas with his madness in the latter half. The first stanza exhibits structural finesse through distich and caesura (cf. ll. 2, 4, 6), features that disappear in the latter part of the poem. In the final stanza, repetition intensifies the narrator's voice: 'My singing sang me fever free, | My singing fades' (ll. 65–66), conveying the agony of the wandering madman. Yeats also refined the refrain as a poetic device. The earlier version's '... the leaves that round me flutter—...' (l. 12), inspired by William Morris's medievalism poem *The Earthly Paradise* (first published in 1870), which reads 'The rose-leaves flutter round me in the night',²⁹⁾ becomes '... the leaves a-flutter round me—' (l. 12) in 1888. By replacing 'that round me flutter' with the archaic 'a-flutter' and reordering the phrase, he slows the rhythm to evoke the falling motion of leaves. This revision marks a move away from direct literary imitation toward a more distinctive poetic voice in 'King Goll'.

The transnational reach generated by *PBYI* was further amplified by the publication of *WO* in 1889, buoyed in part by the high tide of Celticism in *fin-de-siècle* London. As Roy Foster notes, the tone of *WO*, though grounded in Irish myth, 'was to appeal to an audience beyond Ireland'.³⁰⁾ Yeats's intent was to make the book mystical Celtic rather than to propagate Irish nationalism, explicitly avoiding 'crudely political pieces',³¹⁾ while also denouncing the biased writings of certain Anglo-Irish writers popular with English readers.³²⁾ Motivated partly by antipathy to such prejudice, and partly by a desire to distinguish himself from well-known Anglo-Irish writers, he criticised those who 'merely magnified an irresponsible type [of Irish people] into the type of a whole nation, and created the stage Irishman'.³³⁾ Yeats thus presents his Celtic work as a genuine offspring of the Irish literature, 'handed down with such accuracy ... as in the very ancient manuscripts',³⁴⁾ with a view to

transnational dissemination.

When preparing *WO* in early 1888,³⁵⁾ Yeats revised the opening stanzas of 'King Goll' to clarify the poem's historical setting and to mute the political overtones, reflecting his version of aesthetic Celticism while seeking greater historical specificity. The earlier versions had portrayed Goll with a ballad-like vagueness, partly owing to Yeats's limited knowledge of Irish myth and his interest in the imaginative uses of history, but the revised text, drawing on his expanding learning,³⁶⁾ realises an aesthetic Celticism distinct from that of other Anglo-Irish writers. Under this intention, the 1889 text identifies the protagonist with Goll mac Morna, the legendary enemy of Fionn mac Cumhaill, as in the first stanza, replacing the line '[a]nd streams, wide-watering, salmon shoaled,' (l. 3 in *PBYI*) with '[m]ine were clan Morna's tribes untold' (l. 3 in *WO*), thereby rooting the character in a recognised mythological framework of the ancient Celtic world.

The poem likewise recasts Goll's adversary within this framework, diluting contemporary political implications and giving instead a more grounded sense of Celticism. In the second stanza of the 1888 text, a herald warns of invaders from south: 'Southward a sea-king masterful | Whips to the sea the cows and swine' (ll. 13–15), imagery that may allude to Viking, but also have a risk of evoking British colonial incursions, a plausible reading given the nationalist tone of *PBYI*. In the 1889 version, however, the lines read: 'To our valleys | Comes a sea-king masterful | To fill with cows his hollow galleys' (ll. 13–15), presenting the sea-king as a mere raider driven by need. Minor as they seem, such revisions register Yeats's commitment to a transnational, aesthetic Celticism informed by historical awareness.

Critical reception of *WO* was mixed, but Yeats was especially gratified by William Morris's praise: 'It is my kind of poetry'.³⁷⁾ For the young Yeats, this affirmation validated his effort to differentiate more idealistic and artistic conception of his poetry from overtly political verse, since Morris, in Yeats's view, exemplified 'the search for ideal beauty, and the

centrality of art as one's life's pursuit'.³⁸⁾ While Yeats retained cultural-nationalist aims, his turn toward aesthetic Celticism marked a decisive step towards a more transnational orientation: not only reaching readers beyond Ireland, but also engaging a contemporaneous literary movement on the Continent.

3. The Fourth and Fifth Versions in an Irish Mode of Symbolism

Yeats's final revisions of 'King Goll', retitled 'The Madness of King Goll' in the late 1890s, coincided with the growing influence of French Symbolism on English literary circles. His engagement with Symbolism was shaped in part by Arthur Symonds, whose *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899) recognised Yeats's literary and artistic Celticism as an extension of Symbolist aesthetics, observing that '[Yeats's] own Irish literary movement is one of [the] expressions [of the Symbolist movement in literature]; [his] own poetry . . . belong[s] to it in the most intimate sense'.³⁹⁾ Although no detailed record of their conversations survives, this association likely strengthened Yeats's conviction that his early verses, including poems on Celtic themes, answered the spirit of the time,⁴⁰⁾ and that Celticism as a local inflection of Symbolism offered a more persuasive alternative than a purely cultural-nationalistic antagonism to the ethos of Victorian England.⁴¹⁾

While Yeats's limited linguistic skills may have constrained his direct access to French texts,⁴²⁾ his understanding of symbols was grounded in his sustained investment in the spirituality of Celticism. For Yeats, Irish myth and legend functioned as true symbols, not allegories, because they resist fixed meanings and invite multiple interpretations.⁴³⁾ As he explained in 'Symbolism in Painting' (1898), 'no symbol tells all its meaning to any generation'.⁴⁴⁾ Myth and legend symbolically serve as a portal to the Irish otherworld, and Yeats's poems of the 1890s demand closer attention for how they reimagine Irish literary tradition through the lens of Symbolist

aesthetics.

The fourth version of 'The Madness of King Goll' appeared in *Poems* (1895), Yeats's first canon-forming collection, whose overarching themes emphasised tradition, beauty, and Celtic spirituality, while politics and 'the [earthly] world' were shunned'.⁴⁵⁾ The volume exhibits syntactic simplicity and a pruning of archaic and obscure expressions.⁴⁶⁾ In lexical terms, the 1895 revision of 'The Madness of King Goll' follows this trajectory; yet the poem also grows rich in evocation, operating through layers of suggestion that stimulate the imagination, which are the hallmarks of Yeats's emerging Symbolist style.

Yeats deploys folkloric and mythic knowledge to heighten this evocative power. In the first stanza, he uses Irish place names symbolically to evoke the majesty of Goll's kingdom and, by extension, his kingship:

I sat on cushioned otter skin:
My word was law from Ith to Emen,
And shook at Invar Amergin
The hearts of the world-troubling seamen,
And drove tumult and war away
From girl and boy and man and beast;
The fields grew fatter day by day,
The wild fowl of the air increased;
And every ancient Ollave said,
While he bent down his fading head.
'He drives away the Northern cold.' (ll. 1-11)

Whereas the 1888 and 1889 versions offer concrete images of Irish landscape through lively natural depiction, the 1895 version places greater faith in the evocative power of Irish place names, whether exotic or mythological in tone. Published by a British printer for English readers likely unfamiliar with Irish mythology, these place names may have conveyed an exotic and veiled image of ancient Ireland. With no glosses on most of these place names provided, except for 'Emen', explained only as 'The capital of the Red Branch kings',⁴⁷⁾ the volume invites imaginative

engagements partly through strangeness. For Yeats, their power was not confined to exoticism: such names embody 'the strong foundations of inherited tradition' found in Irish legend, and by invoking them he could '[add] to places already made holy by some legend of saint or hero new significance'.⁴⁸⁾

Alongside the place names, solar symbolism introduces an additional layer of imagination by portraying Goll's power both to repel enemies and to fertilise his kingdom. As Frank Kinahan notes, Yeats was then influenced by John Rhys's studies of solar worship in pan-Celtic myth, echoes of which sound in the poem.⁴⁹⁾ Goll's kingship is associated with a solar power capable of overcoming 'the powers of death and darkness and cool and evil, [coming] from the north'.⁵⁰⁾ This motif reappears in the Druids' acclamation, 'He drives away the Northern cold' (l. 11), which alludes to the Fomoroh, mythic beings linked with darkness and winter, whom Yeats believed to dwell 'under the sea'.⁵¹⁾ Whereas earlier versions voiced such praise more directly, for instance, 'He brings the age of gold' (l. 11 in the 1888 text), the 1895 Symbolist revision employs solar imagery to suggest a symbolic triumph over dark forces. The arrival of pirates in 'dark-beaked hollow galleys' (l. 16) further sharpens the contrast: their cold, desolate origins recall the Fomoroh's northern hellish realm, and stand opposed to Goll's flourishing realm, where '[t]he fields grew fatter day by day, | [t]he wild fowl of the air increased' (l. 7-8).

This symbolic duality, solar vitality versus northern darkness, reappears in the final stanza. After abdicating his kingdom in the third stanza, Goll wanders the natural world in madness and discovers a tympan, a stringed instrument, through which he expresses his suffering:

I sang how, when day's toil is done,
Orchil shakes out her long dark hair
That hides away the dying sun
And sheds faint odours through the air:
When my hand passed from wire to wire

It quenched, with sound like falling dew
The whirling and the wandering fire; (ll. 61–67)

Goll's abdication is mythologised as a sunset; his suffering is solaced through singing to Orchil, a Fomorian sorceress who stands in pointed contrast to his former solar identity as king.

In addition to presenting the antithesis of light and dark, Goll's song about his madness was reconfigured in quite different form filled with evocation. In earlier versions, his song is framed as a folkloric tale that emphasises his affinity with marginal figures in nature, such as 'toads and every outlawed things' (l. 60 in the 1889 text), with whom he exchanges '[t]he song of outlaws and their fear' (l. 64 in the 1889 text). By contrast, the 1895 text recasts madness as a unique perception of natural landscape, transforming it into mythological tale by his insane imagination: his insanity now enables him to apprehend that a sunset is caused by Orchil's act (ll. 62–64). This transformation anticipates Yeats's 1900 essay 'The Symbolism of Poetry', which argues that 'trance, or madness, or deep meditation' enables one to transcend reason and intuitively perceive symbolic meaning.⁵²⁾ Yet Goll's imaginative power proves fragile, surfacing only when he sings to the tympan. Once the instrument is broken, both his poetic vision and solace it provides disappear: he can '[b]ut lift a mournful ulalu, | [f]or the kind wires are torn and still' (ll. 68–69), and he is left to wander a bleak, inhospitable natural world.

Through shifts in the protagonist's mode of speech, Yeats accentuates the contrast between sanity and madness, thereby the poem attained the depth in evocation. Earlier versions do not explicitly present Goll's kingly or authoritative speech, but the 1895 text introduces it clearly in line 2: 'My word was law'. This expression of regal control stands contrast to the frenzied singing at the onset of madness, '[a]nd with loud singing I rushed on | [b]y rocky shore and rushy fen' (ll. 31–32), and to the fragmented murmurings of the wandering madman: '[m]urmuring, to a fitful tune, | [h]ow I have followed, night and day, | [a] tramping

of tremendous feet' (ll. 52–54). These transitions are not the stylistic variations in poetic narration, but rather bringing integral to the poem in the point of mirroring his psychological descent and the loss of identity as a king.

Further revisions in the 1899 reissue of *Poems* refine the poem's evocative power in line with Yeats's Symbolist principles. This pursuit of poetic perfection is particularly evident in the reworking of the third stanza. After Goll's descent into madness, the poem renders his running away from the battlefield through an intensified portrayal of laughter:

I laughed aloud and hurried on
By rocky shore and rushy fen;
I laughed because birds fluttered by,
And starlight gleamed, and clouds flew high,
And rushes waved and waters rolled. (ll. 31–35)

In the 1895 version, Goll's abdication had been symbolised by the breaking of the spear, 'between my hands the staff | Of my long spear with song and laugh' (ll. 33–34, 1895 text). The 1899 revision displaces this emblematic gesture in favour of mad laughter at a desolate Irish landscape, viewed through the lens of insanity. Yeats here deploys what David Daiches terms 'lunatic logic': an irrational, intuitive response to the world that signals psychic dislocation.⁵³⁾ Yet this depiction of madness also resonates with Symbolist aesthetics. In his 1900 essay 'The Symbolism of Poetry', Yeats described insanity as a privileged state for accessing the hidden meanings of symbols; in this context, the landscape assumes a symbolic value intelligible only to the visionary or the mad.⁵⁴⁾ Goll's inexplicable laughter thus becomes not merely a sign of loss, but one of visionary insight.

The visual framing of the book complements these textual changes and reflects Yeats's evolving conception of poetry in Irish mode of Symbolism. The 1899 *Poems* featured a new cover by the Irish spiritualist artist Althea Gyles, replacing Herbert Granville Fell's design, whose angelic figure, resembling Saint Michael,

Yeats had dismissed as expressionless.⁵⁵⁾ By contrast, Gyles's mythologically inflected design aligns with Yeats's imagination grounded in Celticism and Symbolist aesthetics⁵⁶⁾: the front cover centres the rose cross deriving from occult iconography, encircled by whirling rose petals; the spine shows a woman's head and hands stretched to her, both surround by rose trees and their branches. For Yeats, the rose is a transnational, timeless symbol that emanates multiple meanings—'a symbol of spiritual love and supreme beauty' in European lore, and in Irish verse a figure for religion, austerity, feminine beauty, and Ireland itself.⁵⁷⁾ By inscribing the rose into the cover design, *Poems* (1899) shows Yeats's broader Symbolist experiment in Irish context, which 'The Madness of King Goll' aligns.

Conclusion

This study has traced the successive revisions of 'The Madness of King Goll' from 1887 to 1899 to examine how Yeats negotiated aesthetic, political, and readerly expectations across shifting cultural contexts. In doing so, it has highlighted his gradual poetic shift from spiritually inflected cultural nationalism to an Irish mode of Symbolism. While critics have often dismissed these early poems as immature precursors to his later work, and Yeats himself admitted in 1908 that he reread some of his early works 'with no little discontent, for [he] find[s], especially in the ballads, some triviality and sentimentality',⁵⁸⁾ he nonetheless continued to include 'The Madness of King Goll' in his canonical collections. This sustained inclusion suggests that reintegration of such critically neglected poems into scholarly discussions enriches our fuller understanding of the development of Yeats's poetic imagination. From its initial ballad-like simplicity to the final Symbolist reimagining, the poem's revision history offers a vital record of Yeats's transformation from a poet engaged in Irish cultural nationalism to one writing within a Symbolist framework grounded in Irish myth and legend. 'The Madness of King Goll'

thus marks formative moments in the development of Yeats's distinctive poetics.

Endnotes

- 1) Peter McDonald, 'Criticism and Interpretation' in W. B. Yeats, *The Poems of W. B. Yeats*, vol. 2, ed. Peter McDonald (London: Routledge, 2021), p. 361. For related discussions of biographical readings in early Yeats criticism, see George Bornstein, 'Remaking Himself: Yeats's Revisions of His Early Canon' in *Text: Transactions of the Society for Textual Scholarship*, vol. 5 (New York: AMS Press, 1991) pp. 339–358; Norman Jeffares, *W. B. Yeats: Man and Poet* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962).
- 2) See Frank Kinahan, 'A Source Note on "The Madness of King Goll"' in *Yeats Annual*, vol. 4, ed. Warwick Gould (London: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 189–194; Brian Foley, 'Yeats's "King Goll": Sources, Revision, and Revisions' in *Yeats: An Annual of Critical and Textual Studies*, vol. 4, eds. Richard J. Finneran and Mary FitzGerald (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1986), pp. 17–32.
- 3) Peter McDonald, 'Criticism and Interpretation' in W. B. Yeats, *The Poems of W. B. Yeats*, vol. 2, p. 361.
- 4) David Holdeman, 'Manuscripts and Revisions' in *W. B. Yeats in Context*, eds. David Holdeman and Ben Levitas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 370.
- 5) Although Yeats ceased drastic revisions after the 1899 version, he continued to make minor changes, often involving punctuation and the spelling of Irish nouns. However, such alterations may not have been made by Yeats himself. According to Peter Allt, variations in punctuation 'appeared to have been caused by the printer's whims, not by the poet's wishes'. See Peter Allt, 'Yeats and the Revision of His Early Verse' in *Hermathena*, vol. 64 (Dublin: Trinity College Dublin, 1944), p. 96.
- 6) Henceforth, the term 'Symbolism' (or 'Symbolist') refers to the literary movement that originated in *fin-de-siècle* France.
- 7) Seán Hewitt, 'Fairy and Folktales of Bedford Park' in *The Oxford Handbook of William Butler Yeats*, eds. Lauren Arrington and Matthew Campbell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), pp. 16–27.
- 8) *Ibid.*, p. 27; Olsen's recent study of *The Leisure Hour* is noteworthy, but it does not consider Yeats or his contemporaries. See Stephanie Olsen, *Juvenile Nation: Youth, Emotions and the Making of the Modern British Citizen 1880–1914* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 23.
- 9) David Lloyd, 'Nationalism and Postcolonialism' in *W. B. Yeats in Context*, eds. David Holdeman and Ben Levitas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 180–181.

- 10) W. B. Yeats, 'King Goll: An Irish Legend' in *The Poems of W. B. Yeats*, vol. 1, p. 465.
- 11) Matthew Campbell, 'Recovering Ancient Ireland' in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Poetry*, eds. Fran Brearton and Alan Gillis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 5.
- 12) Peter McDonald, 'Sources' in W. B. Yeats, *The Poems of W. B. Yeats*, vol. 1, p. 464.
- 13) W. B. Yeats, 'The Poetry of Sir Samuel Ferguson 1' in *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, vol. 9: *Early Articles and Reviews*, eds. John P. Frayne and Madeleine Marchaterre (New York: Scribner, 2004), p. 4; W. B. Yeats, 'What is Popular Poetry?' in *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, vol. 4: *Early Essays*, eds. Richard J. Finneran and George Bornstein (New York: Scribner, 2007), p. 5; Although he adapted his approach to meet the expectations of various periodicals and expressed praise for certain Irish contemporaries—praise he would later deemed excessive—these early articles nonetheless offer a window into his evolving poetic thought.
- 14) W. B. Yeats, 'The Poetry of R. D. Joyce' in *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, vol. 9, p. 33.
- 15) Colin Meir, *The Ballads and Songs of W. B. Yeats: The Anglo-Irish Heritage in Subject and Style* (Macmillan: Macmillan, 1974), p. 9.
- 16) Charles Francis Altieri, 'Introduction' in *Yeats and the Tradition of the Literary Ballad* (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1969), p. 4.
- 17) W. B. Yeats, 'The Poetry of Sir Samuel Ferguson 2' in *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, vol. 9, pp. 12–13.
- 18) Charles Francis Altieri, 'Introduction' in *Yeats and the Tradition of the Literary Ballad* (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1969), p. 4.
- 19) All the variants of the poem are quoted from W. B. Yeats, *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats*, eds. Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach (London: Macmillan, 1977), pp. 81–86.
- 20) W. B. Yeats, 'The Poetry of R. D. Joyce' in *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, vol. 9, p. 33.
- 21) W. B. Yeats, 'Popular Ballad Poetry of Ireland' in *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, vol. 9, p. 108.
- 22) R. F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life*, vol. 1: *The Apprentice Mage 1865–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 75–76.
- 23) 'To John O'Leary' in *Poems and Ballads of Young Ireland*, eds. W. B. Yeats, et al. (Dublin: M. H. Gill and Son, 1888), p. 2.
- 24) W. B. Yeats, 'Rose Kavanagh' in *Letters to the New Island*, ed. Horace Reynolds (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), p. 122.
- 25) W. B. Yeats, *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Allan Wade (London: Rupert Hart-Davis; New York: Octagon Books, 1954), p. 71.
- 26) *Ibid.*, p. 98.
- 27) *Ibid.*
- 28) *Ibid.*
- 29) Peter McDonald's notes on 'King Goll: an Irish Legend' in W. B. Yeats, *The Poems of W. B. Yeats*, vol. 1, p. 466.
- 30) *Ibid.*, pp. 85–86.
- 31) *Ibid.*
- 32) *Ibid.*, p. 98.
- 33) W. B. Yeats, 'Introduction to *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*' in *Writings on Irish Folklore, Legend and Myth*, ed. Robert Welch (London: Kindle edn, Penguin Modern Classics, 1993).
- 34) *Ibid.*
- 35) Peter McDonald, 'Date of Revisions' in *The Poems of W. B. Yeats*, vol. 1, p. 625.
- 36) Kinahan, 'A Source Note on "The Madness of King Goll"', p. 189.
- 37) W. B. Yeats, *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Allan Wade (London: Rupert Hart-Davis; New York: Octagon Books, 1954), p. 102; see also R. F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life*, vol. 1, p. 87.
- 38) Francis O'Gorman, 'Among the Victorians' in *The Oxford Handbook of William Butler Yeats*, eds. Lauren Arrington and Matthew Campbell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), pp. 46–47.
- 39) Arthur Symons, 'To W. B. Yeats' in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, ed. Matthew Creasy (Manchester: Carcanet Press Ltd., 2014), p. 3.
- 40) Denis Donogue, 'Yeats: The Questions of Symbolism' in *The Symbolist Movement in the Literature of European Languages*, ed. Anna Balakian (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1984), p. 280.
- 41) W. B. Yeats, 'A Symbolical Dream in Paris' in *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, vol. 9, pp. 234–235.
- 42) Yeats's engagement with Symbolism was largely mediated through translations and conversations with Arthur Symons. Symons read to him works of French Symbolist literature, including those by Verlaine, Mallarmé, Huysmans, and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam. Nonetheless, as one of Yeats's acquaintances remarked critically in 1898, Yeats 'only knew two of Mallarmé's lyrics'. See R. F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life*, vol. 1, p. 199.
- 43) W. B. Yeats, 'The Symbolism of Poetry' in *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, vol. 4, pp. 118–119. Although Yeats had commended symbols and metaphors equally conventional in the 1880s, he started to see symbols favourable as his understanding of Symbolism deepened. See Yeats's review on Katherine Tynan's *Shamrocks* (London: K. Paul, Trench, 1887), her second book of verse: 'I wish the sick princess ended differently, ... at any rate, not operatic and literary. I object to the motive, not because it is fanciful, but because it is a kind of motive becoming more and more conventional. 'The metaphors of things' and 'The things themselves!' There is I imagine, this same difference in the religious poems, 'the things themselves' becoming

- more numerous [by the time when Tynan's second book was published]. In the first [book, there are] the religion of symbol and metaphor, . . .'. See W. B. Yeats, 'Miss Tynan's New Book' in *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, vol. 9, p. 66.
- 44) W. B. Yeats, 'Symbolism in Painting' in *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, vol. 4, p. 109.
 - 45) *W. B. Yeats: A Life*, vol. 1, p. 150.
 - 46) Thomas Parkinson, *W. B. Yeats: Self-Critic: A Study of His Early Verse* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), pp. 1–50; see also R. F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life*, vol. 1, p. 150.
 - 47) *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats*, p. 795.
 - 48) Kathleen Raine, 'Preface' in *Place Names in the Writings of William Butler Yeats*, eds. James McGarry and Edward Malins (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1976), p. 6.
 - 49) Frank Kinahan, 'A Source Note on "The Madness of King Goll"', pp. 189–194.
 - 50) *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats*, p. 796.
 - 51) *Ibid.*, p. 795.
 - 52) W. B. Yeats, 'The Symbolism of Poetry' in *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, vol. 4, p. 119.
 - 53) David Daiches, 'The Earlier Poems: Some Themes and Patterns' in *Excited Reverie: Centenary Tribute to William Butler Yeats 1865–1939*, eds. A. Norman Jeffares and K. G. W. Cross (London: Macmillan, 1965), p. 53.
 - 54) W. B. Yeats, 'The Symbolism of Poetry' in *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, vol. 4, p. 119.
 - 55) George Bornstein, 'Publishers and the Material Text' in *W. B. Yeats in Context*, eds. David Holdeman and Ben Levitas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 379.
 - 56) W. B. Yeats, 'A Symbolic Artist and the Coming of Symbolic Art' in *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, vol. 9, p. 426.
 - 57) W. B. Yeats, 'Notes' in *The Wind Among the Reeds* (New York and London: The Bodley Head, 1899), pp. 74–78.
 - 58) *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats*, p. 844.
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初期 W. B. イェイツ詩学と「ゴル王の狂気」の改稿

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要旨 本稿は、W. B. イェイツの初期詩「ゴル王の狂気」（1887 年）の五段階にわたる改稿過程を分析し、19 世紀末のアイランド文化的ナショナリズムおよび同時代のヨーロッパの文学的潮流が本作品に与えた影響を明らかにするものである。The *Leisure Hour* 誌での初出から、詩集 *Poems* (1899) への収録に至るまで、本作品は異例とも言える大幅な改稿を重ねたが、近年のイェイツ研究ではその文学的意義は十分に検討されてこなかった。

本作品においてイェイツは、アイランドの伝説や神話を文学的に再創造するという彼の芸術における重要な問題に対し、当時の文学的潮流を取り入れつつ、掲載媒体とその想定読者の違いに応じて多様なアプローチを試みている。詩人としての活動初期のイェイツはロンドンを拠点とし、英国人読者の政治的・宗教的感受性に配慮しながらも、アイランド文化的ナショナリズムに関与し、ケルトの口承文化を継ぐ詩人としての自己像を次第に確立していった。その過程で、急進的な民族主義的文学運動から徐々に距離を取りつつ、フランス象徴主義の影響を吸収することで、アイランドの伝統的想像力に根差した独自の詩学を形成していく。

本稿が扱う「ゴル王の狂気」は、当初は歴史と伝説の狭間を想像的に語るバラッド風の詩であったが、神話的象徴に満ちた詩へと変貌を遂げた。本研究はイェイツの詩学の発展を、改稿過程の分析を通じて文化的・政治的背景および読者層の関係から再検討するものである。

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