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“All changed, changed utterly: Concept of Change in Yeats’ “Easter 1916” vis – a – vis Jordan’s film *Michael Collins*

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Abstract-- The “Easter 1916” and *Michael Collins*, a poem and a biographical drama which chiefly present the concept of change, sometime overtly and sometime covertly, sometime positively and sometime negatively. The moral, physical and psychological changes which are hidden in every nook and cranny of the poem as well as the film, drive me eagerly to commit to paper. The concept of “terrible beauty” is one of the most important aspects which implies the concept of “change” rather it’s probably the one which leads the freedom fighters to bring the “change”. In *Michael Collins* (1996) the “change” is in the whole ambience of Ireland. The major change is freedom. We can also experience the change in Harry Boland's nature which is perhaps representing the northern part of Ireland whereas Michael Collins represents the southern part.

The film also emphasizes the change in the mind of common people in Ireland who was furious and tempted for bringing the ultimate “change”, the freedom. Kitty Kiernan who represents Cathleen ni Houlihan or mother Ireland, the change is evident in her attitude when she becomes more dependent on Collins perhaps because only he can only be able to get the “change”. I would like to explain and elaborate the concept of “change” in “Easter 1916” in the first five paras of my paper and then I gradually will move on to the movie *Michael Collins* in the rest of the paras. I want every reader to minutely understand and perceive how the concept of “change” fetches changes in Irish national history, poet’s mind as well as in the mind of common people. Patrick Crotty noted in his article in *Journal of Irish Studies* that “The utter change that comes over the protagonists in actual death could scarcely be further from unwelcome transformation endured by subjects of elegies – compare 'But oh the heavy change now thou art gone' in *Lycidas*. It is a change twice hailed by Yeats, and then questioned – never, as in elegy, mourned” (Crotty 14).

Keywords-- Change, mind, morality, revolution, unrests

“The only constant in life is change, uttered by Heraclitus, suggests that the world and everything in this world change with time. WB Yeats' “Easter 1916” gives us the same picture. The title of the poem harks back to the terrific event, attempted by Irish freedom fighters whom Yeats pays homage through this verse. The poetic persona begins with the normal descriptions of life often happen in mundane world. S/he “met” with some people everyday and evening, talked to them, used to crack joke and had great time with them.

The poet further utters the they were safe because they were different men then, the spark of nationhood or freedom did not occur, the crave for free nation had not seduced them till then. The word “fire” evokes the zeal which will change their lives entirely, even which leads them towards the death. They were certain that they had home where motely is worn” (Yeats 14). Then the poetic persona was being shocked and startled at the fact that nothing remained the same, everything had changed for the sake of terrible beauty:

All changed, changed utterly:

A terrible beauty is born. (Yeats 17-18).

The whole first para of the poem encapsulates the concept of “change” or transformation which transforms men from a happily- living people to heroic figures or even martyrs, who can sacrifice everything only to attain freedom, a terrible beauty”. The poet may here refer to Cathleen ni Houliha or mother Ireland who tempts Michael Gillane (represents all young men of Ireland) to the battlefield and she became a beautiful queen, the “terrible beauty” for whom men engage in mayhem, bloodbath and many other terrible acts (Yeats; *Cathleen ni Houlihan*) Arslan Naseer argued that this uprising was “terrible” because of the “bloodbath” and this leads to the “change” which we call “Independence” (Naseer 3).

In the second stanza the poetic persona indirectly mentions the name of four freedom fighters who are in Yeats’ heart, we can see here a change of tone as if poet wants to tell that whatever they had done was needless, here we experience an ambivalent figure of Yeats. The poetic persona is talking about a woman, perhaps the Countess Constance Markievicz who was one of the rebels, who also fought for her nation and sacrificed her life. It is heard that she was sentenced to death and then her punishment reduced to life- time incarceration. Yeats was very sympathetic towards her as he wrote another poem, “In Memory of 'Eva Gore- Booth and Con Markiewicz” which is published in the collection book, *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1933). The poetic persona was repeatedly praising her, her beauty and voice, and also lamenting about the fact that her “voice grew shrill”.



It is the change of her beauty and her state that perhaps was not preferred by the poet. The poet here may indicate that the revolutionary zeal and her crave for freedom change her feminine beauty and make her a heroic figure. Yeats perhaps does not support this change of the “woman”. And the s/he refers to another freedom fighter who directly participates in the Easter uprising and sacrifice of his life, Padraic Pearse who once used to keep a “school” and ride horses but situation changed him and made him a renowned freedom fighter. He was also a poet but who sacrificed his career only for the sake of “change” or “terrible beauty”. Another “Man” is Thomas MacDonagh, who also a poet but despite that he took part in Easter 1916 uprising and died. There again he is talking about change, the change that changes everyone’ life. The poet is praising him and his” nature”. At last but not the least the poet is mentioning a name though bitterly of “vainglorious lout” who “had done the most bitter wrong” (Yeats 35) to someone and the person is Major John MacBride, who died in the Easter 1916 uprising. In spite of being his enemy he is referring to his name. This is because his patriotism and immortal deeds have changed poet’s mentality and compell him to write about him. The poet didn’t expect him(MacBride) to change as he knew him as a bad person or enemy. The change of personal view comes into fore here:

He, too has been changed in his turn

Transformed utterly:

A terrible beauty is born (Yeats 40-42).

The changes only happen to attain only one object that is the “terrible beauty”. It is worth noting that the poet is not satisfied with this change as he addresses their “change” or sacrifice as “casual comedy”.

This is also evident in his poem “September 1918” where he recalls the past and laments repeatedly about the present Ireland by memorizing O’ Leary, seemed a father figure to him:

Romantic Ireland’s dead and gone,

It’s with O’Leary in the grave.(Yeats 7-8)

In the next stanza the poetic persona talks about pastoral or country side landscape and how these become transformed and everything becomes new. This stanza has something new different from others where we can experience here that “change” is necessary to move forward and it is inevitable thing which everyone has to accept. The poet at first expounds the firmness of the rebels’ mind and metaphorically compares their heart to stone which remains the same in every situation, weather and atmosphere.

Here the poet wants to convey by the phrase “enchanted stone” that their hearts become enchanted but it was different at a time, the “terrible beauty” enchanted it and made it firm, again a conceptual of change which leads that to the battlefield. Here Yeats’ tone is changing he is acknowledging their great deeds. As Arslan Naseer points out “at this, Yeats changes his tone towards the rebels” (Naseer 4). Then the poet was talking about horse, riders, birds and cloud, changing with the passing of time as it is so natural. After change there is new life, there is new hope and there is something which is celebrated. The poet here advocates the same thing where even the animal life is celebrating this:

And a horse plashes within it

Where long-legged moor hens dive

Ands hens to moor-cock call

Minute by minute they live: (Yeats 53-56)

For the first time the poet appreciated the “change” and also let his heart to go by the “change”. This is pointed out in an article that “Yeats’ “Easter 1916” can be understood as a tribute to “change” caused by those who involved in the Easter uprising in Ireland” (Topic of Change).

In the last stanza he pays tribute to the” larger than life” figures who brought the whole “change”, who gave birth to the “terrible beauty” and who changed the world but did not change their aim. He acknowledges their sacrifices and called it as “too long”, the poet-speaker here asks a rhetorical question to express his mourns over the bloodshed, loss of lives and execution of the lives of all freedom fighters. Yeats is perhaps regretting for not taking part in that movement actively, for not sacrificing his life for “terrible beauty”, for not bringing the ultimate “change” in Irish history, and this is evident by the words: “our part / To murmur the name upon name” (Yeats 61-62). He then uses the word “mother”, referring to the “mother Ireland” who laments over the death of thousands of freedom fighters, who gave us their lives to bring the “change”, the change which they did not enjoy, but making other enjoy this. Here the poetic persona reminds us of their deaths, how they have done for the country, how they bring ultimate “change” and establish free nation. He again asks a rhetorical question that whether their deaths are “needless” and then he clarifies that just because they have dreamt of the free nation, they died for it and after that the free nation has established, so their patriotism, their zeal and their revolution are not “needless” at all. The poet pays to all the freedom fighters through MacDonagh, MacBride, Connolly and Pearse. He admits that because of them the “green is worn”, “green” here represents the Irish national flag, the ultimate “change”.



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Everything became “changed utterly”, even poet’s mind had changed a lot, he became more sympathetic towards the martyrs he even could pay tribute to his utmost enemy MacBride, who snatched his beloved Maud Gonne and later abandoned her. The poet now fully accepts the “change” as well as “the terrible beauty”. We can also experience much the same kind of change in Neill Jordan’s movie *Michael Collins* where “larger than life” character Michael Collins sacrifices everything to bring the “change” in Ireland.

Michael Collins (1996) is a biographical drama film written and directed by Neill Jordan on the Irish independence war, headed by Michael Collins and how he snatches freedom by sacrificing his life.

The film also depicts the concept of “change” in every part of it. The film opens *in medias res* in 1922 after the death of Michael Collins (Michael Collins (film)). The very first scene encapsulates the notion of “change” by the dialogue of Joe, describing how Michael Collins, the protagonist changed from a flamboyant boy to a serious rebel who can do anything and everything for his nation:

But he never did what anyone expected.

He got the British soldiers out of here, and no one expected that (Jordan 0:1:27- 0:1:30)

From the very speech of Joe one can understand that Michael has something special what made him a “larger than life” character, which is evident in the “change” of his personality, perhaps a *renaissance* of his inner self. The movie begins with the failure of Easter 1916 uprising and the execution of the legendary leaders whom Yeats repeatedly commemorates in his “verse”. The movie shows us the picture of Michael’s becoming a heroic figure and the “change” of himself day by day. One this is certain that the sparkle begins to enkindle from this Easter 1916 uprising and this foreshadows the ultimate “change” Collins says that he will not go by British’ rules but invent his won after this uprising (Jordan 0: 05: :22- 0:05:23) and this scene may well represent of the fact that he is going to innovate something new, something hopeful and something terribly beautiful. Eamon de Valera, the president of Irish republic has been changing himself from a freedom fighter to a negative character who opposes Collins’s treaty. Harry Boland and Michael Collins represent homosocial banter, it may also represent the northern and southern part of Ireland. Michael tells Harry that they could “settle down”, this suggests that perhaps Michael wants a change in their lives a freedom from all this bondage and wish to live their lives freely. When Michael was giving the public speech for the first time in the film he tries to “change” the mentality of the people and make them all revolutionary figures so that if Michael dies everyone can take his place.

The movie then introduces Kitty Kiernan, who represents the mother Ireland, all women of Ireland and the “terrible beauty”. Kitty also represents the women in patriarchal society whose only identity is that she is her “father’s daughter” and nothing more to it. But as the film develops we can see “change” in her life who becomes a saviour at the same time “seductress”. He nurses Michael which evokes her caring and motherly instinct. She is becoming important part of Michael’s life which perhaps suggests Michael’s crave for “terrible beauty” and mother Ireland which will change Michael partially.

The concept of change is evidently clear when Michael trains the mind of farmers to change themselves into revolution. Michael took a “sod of turf” and turned this into a fire weapon which connotes Michael contribution behind enkindling the fire into their heart, a fire to attain freedom, change and “terrible beauty”. Collins trained the ordinary people in transforming their life and making them for “guerrilla warfare”. Collins is introduced then with Broy, a detective, who works under the G-men but for the Irish people or Ireland. When Michael meets Broy he thought him as a british men when he knows about him, he changes his mind tries to rely on him, who can give him secret information. This represents the path of conspiracy, secrecy and cunningness which are needed to take to set free the country. It is the change in Michael’s mind which makes him feel good in taking this path. The another instance when Michael tells everyone that he is not a man of “intelligence” but a minister of “gunrunning, daylight robbery and general mayhem” (Jordan 0:19:35 – 0:19:39), this is also a scene where Michael wants everybody to change their views about him, to see him as he is and then he proves that he is also a man of intelligence by telling the members that they are planned to be arrested. Collins here wants to show them that one man can do many duties towards his country and also inspires them indirect to “change” themselves too. This is the first instance when Eamon De Valera differs from Collins and chooses to be incarcerated, this scene leads us to anticipate the rift between Michael and Eamon De Valera. There is a “change” in the mind of Broy though the “change” is in good sense, when Collins goes to Broy’s office for checking information recorded about them, after handling this matter Broy gains much more confidence and becomes more patriot: “After tonight I can handle anything” (Jordan 0:30:23- 0:30:25).

Michael instructs his men to send warning letter to every G-men and then kill them, this scene shows how he changes his mind time to time and makes the journey much harder and more difficult. We can see a “change” in his general characteristic when he warns his men not to spend much bullets, though this is a comic banter but it suggests how he is becoming miserly character for the sake of his country.



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Michael Collins is not a figure who deliberately wants to fight against or “hate” the British men rather he wants peace. This refers to the fact that he is a peace-loving person who is compelled to do this “bloody mayhem”, this is another aspect of his character which enables the audience to transform or “change” their thoughts about Michael Collins. He also mournfully says that the Britishers have given them “no way out” but to choose fighting against them. The scene where De Valera had to be dressed up like a whore also “changes” the mentality that not only one could die for country but also could do many other things which are generally unsung. De Valera is addressed as “Kathleen”, this refers to the Cathleen ni Houlihan, who had to be a seductress and drives the fighters to fight for her (country). Eamon De Valera plan to separate Harry Boland from Michael Collins, evokes a great transformation in the whole Ireland, this perhaps suggests the brexit that happens between Northern and Southern Ireland. Eamon was scared of leaving them together because they might bring the “change”, which he always talked about De Valera is here restricting the “change” by conspiring against them. After Harry goes to USA, Kitty becomes much closer to Michael, encapsulating Michael’s attraction towards the mother Ireland and also this refers to the “change” the is evident in Kitty, for she begins to like Michael, meaning the mother Ireland wants Michael much more than any other to bring freedom, the “change”. When Michael asks Kitty to change her hotel, this suggests Michael’s protection of mother Ireland from any kind of harm. Broy’s death changes Michael’s life a lot, he doesn’t want to do mayhem any more , he begins to wish peace and wants to be a normal person that is why he says:

For God’s sake, give me one free night to be a human being;

Would the bloody Irish Republic leave me some time off?(1:19:18 – 1:19:28)

He now wants to change the whole situation, he wants no war, that is why he signs the treaty, which denotes Irish independence under British rule. He repeatedly says that that is the time for “peace”, and he doesn’t want any mayhem because he is tired of it, he lost many people, kills many people and now wants freedom peacefully, this is a great “change” in his nature, though this change is perhaps necessary for making bigger “change”, attaining freedom:

The alternative to this treaty is war which nobody nobody in this gathering can even contemplate (Jordan 1:31:35 – 1:31:42)

Eamon De Valera opposes the treaty, which brings another “change” which brings the unthinkable mishaps, the death of Harry Boland as well as the death of Michael Collins. Harry also opposes the treaty and accompanies Eamon. Harry was once his best friend but now changes a lot, even opposes him. Michael repeatedly tries to let him understand his situation but Harry dies, this represents a grave change, the permanent separation of northern Ireland from southern. Michael also has to die for his country, for bringing the utmost “change”. Kitty, mourns for him, represents the mourning of the mother Ireland for all the martyrs who lost their lives for their nation. It is the “terrible beauty”, the costs that had to be paid, which calls for thousands of lives and oceans of blood. The concept of “change” is everywhere from the first to the end, the “change” which caused the terrible misfortunes.

Michael Collins wanted to live, see and enjoy the “change” but he had to die very earlier, for making way others enjoy the “change”, the freedom. He goes to the West Cork to meet De Valera, and this leads his death in the village of Beal na Blath, a historical place which makes the utmost saddened “change”.

Which changes the whole life of The Irish republic. To sum up, the concept of *change* is evident and justified in every part of the poem and film. The poem and the film both perceive the “change” positively and acknowledge that “change” can be happened as it is law of nature, and only because of the “change” the people can be developed and updated. The poet tries to commemorate and eternalize the name of these national heroes who per-haps could have been unsung and ignored. The poet also changed his mind who once saw the martyrs as a simple man now began to see them as national heroes who are worth remembering. The movie also presents the same thing where Michael Collins was once a normal guy who becomes “larger than life” figure and a martyr. The whole concept of “change” and the changes that happened is for the good and development. As Benjamin Franklin says “when you are finished changing, you’re finished” (A Quote).

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