

Summary of the *William Butler Yeats – Dyslexic Poet or Three Dimensional Thinker.*

The initial idea for this study appeared when readings on or related to the life of the famous poet and politician W.B. Yeats yielded some very unexpected facts. Terry Eagleton in his witty commentary on contemporary Irish life *The Truth about the Irish* referred to the fact that Yeats was refused a post in University College Dublin because of making a spelling mistake in his letter of application. Eagleton went on to state that it still remains one of the great mysteries of Ireland that despite his problems writing the English language Yeats is regarded as one of the its greatest poets.

Biographies and Yeats's own autobiographical writings make innumerable references to the problems the poet experienced when learning to read and the poor results he achieved when he did attend a proper school. In fact, Yeats only went to a formal school for two years and did not even apply for university, which was a tradition in his family, because he himself did not think he would pass the entrance examinations. John Kelly, who prepared Yeats's collected letters for publication stated that the poet's terrible handwriting had one advantage and that was to hide his even worse spelling. Kelly also admitted that some of Yeats's letters had to be "retouched" in order to make them coherent, which is not normal practice.

As many of the above-mentioned traits are common to dyslexics, the question began to form; could W.B. Yeats have been dyslexic. However, in order to pose these questions the exact nature of dyslexia had to be researched. This study revealed that when properly orientated dyslexics can learn to read and often, in fact enjoy reading tremendously. Other aspects of a dyslexia mind-function were found to concur with traits of the poet. Visual or three-dimensional thinking, an evolutionary thought process, originality of thought and freshness of ideas, elements ever-present in the poet's work, are also common factors associated with a dyslexic mind. Many parallels were also found between the poet's motivation and work methods and that of dyslexics who had learned to overcome the negative aspects of way their minds work and unleash the power of the positive traits.

Obviously, in hindsight, a definite conclusion cannot be reached as to whether W.B. Yeats was dyslexic or not, but it is certainly evident that his thought process worked in a visual or three-dimensional fashion and that he also experienced tremendous difficulty dealing with the physical mechanics of the written language, both as a child and throughout his adult life. Many positive points can be learning by studying his life in order to understand the manner in which he was helped and how he helped himself to overcome the terrible difficulties he experienced learning to read as a child and dealing with spelling, punctuation and grammar throughout his life. That some one who had to work so hard in order to get to

grips with the physical mechanics of written language became one of the greatest poets of the 20th century should help to take away any feeling of shame or inadequacy that a current-day counterpart may feel. This aspect is particularly relevant today as educationalists clearly state that presently dyslexic effects up to 20% of the world's population.

1st August 2005, Pontével

Cecilia Maria Beecher Martins