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葉慈《塔》中書寫之場所及想像旅程

The Place of Writing and the Imaginative Journey in

W. B. Yeats's *The Tower*

The seal of National Taiwan University is a circular emblem. It features a central bell (the 'University Bell') flanked by two stylized figures. The seal is surrounded by the university's name in Chinese characters: '國立臺灣大學' at the top and '勵品學國' at the bottom.

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摘要

本論文探討葉慈之詩集《塔》與詩人位於愛爾蘭高威郡之灞列力塔之間的關聯。灞列力塔乃詩人之藝術象徵，亦為其書寫之場所。筆者認為《塔》描繪了一想像旅程，且反映了詩人對於其祖國創建之刻之持續關憂。本論文分為三章，第一章分析《塔》中詩作寫作之歷史背景，並探討促使葉慈回到一九二零年代愛爾蘭政治與文化中心之兩重要因素。第二章探討「塔」在葉慈所熟知之文學及神秘學傳統中的意象，並探究灞列力塔於地誌上之重要性，以了解該塔如何補全葉慈建構之「塔」的意象，並成為詩人書寫之場所。第三章探討葉慈於《塔》中對當代歷史之沉思，筆者認為詩人之沉思，乃循一重複進行之遠離與貼近之軌跡，始於詩人對年老之危機及藝術家身分產生的質疑，經「夢回」愛爾蘭多變及暴力的一九二零年代初期，後發掘其對群體及個人圓滿性之理想意象，而終於意識「漫遊」之平靜與滿足。藉由以上討論，本論文冀望能提供重新檢視並欣賞葉慈《塔》之不同觀點。

關鍵字：《塔》、灞列力塔、書寫之場所、詩歌象徵、詩作格式

Abstract

This thesis investigates the relationship between *The Tower* and Yeats's Galway tower, Thoor Ballylee, as his symbol of art and place of writing. I argue that *The Tower* represents an imaginative journey and reflects Yeats's sustained meditation on the founding moments of his native country. The first chapter offers a background survey of the historical context in which most of the *Tower* poems were written, and examines the two main factors that had motivated Yeats's return to the political and cultural center of Ireland in the 1920s. The second chapter begins with an investigation of the literary and occult associations of the tower symbol most relevant to Yeats's understanding, and seeks to tease out the topographic significance of Thoor Ballylee in completing the tower symbol and becoming Yeats's place of writing. The third chapter analyzes how *The Tower* can be read as an imaginative journey of the poet's repeated disengagement and reengagement with contemporaneous Irish history, which begins from the problem of old age and questioning of the artist's role, through a "dreaming back" of Ireland's volatile and violent recent past in the early 1920s, discovers an ideal image for the unity of being for both community and individual, and finally concludes in the contentment and equanimity of the mind's "wandering." In the process, the place of writing has also become the written place in the work. By doing so, this thesis hopes to provide new vantage points from which to reexamine and appreciate one of Yeats's finest poetry collections.

Keywords: *The Tower*, Thoor Ballylee, the place of writing, poetic symbol, lyric form

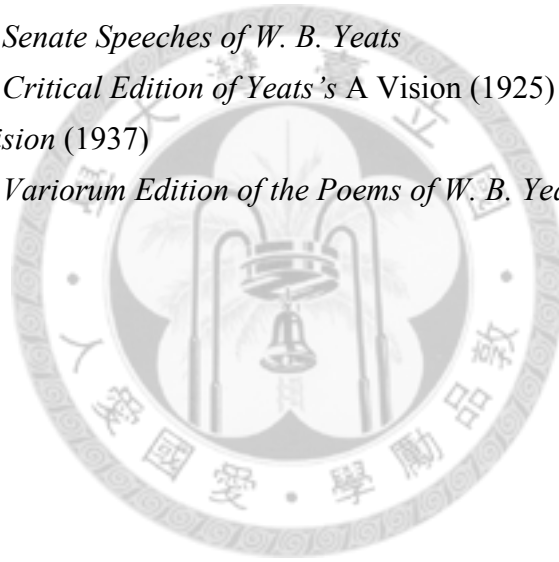
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Abbreviations

<i>Au</i>	<i>Autobiographies</i>
<i>CL</i>	<i>The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats: Electronic Edition</i>
<i>CT</i>	<i>The Celtic Twilight</i>
<i>E&I</i>	<i>Essays and Introductions</i>
<i>Ex</i>	<i>Explorations</i>
<i>LE</i>	<i>Later Essays</i>
<i>Mem</i>	<i>Memoirs</i>
<i>Mm</i>	<i>The Tower (1928): Manuscript Materials</i>
<i>P</i>	<i>The Poems</i>
<i>P&I</i>	<i>Prefaces and Introductions</i>
<i>SS</i>	<i>The Senate Speeches of W. B. Yeats</i>
<i>VA</i>	<i>The Critical Edition of Yeats's A Vision (1925)</i>
<i>VB</i>	<i>A Vision (1937)</i>
<i>VP</i>	<i>The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats</i>



Introduction

The title of this thesis is inspired by Seamus Heaney's *The Place of Writing*, in which he investigates the role of place in the creative process. Commenting on the relationship between place and corresponding literary works, Heaney first examines how Ireland was made "part of the specifically artistic action" in the works of epoch-making writers such as Yeats, Joyce, and Wilde (*The Place of Writing* 19). He begins with W. B. Yeats, whose writing, as David Holdeman and Ben Levitas have pointed out in *W. B. Yeats in Context*, is "notably 'cartographic': rich in allusion to landscape, often construing in potent symbolic terms the localities he held to be significant" (4). Specifically, Heaney's focus is on the unique relationship between Yeats and his Galway tower, Thoor Ballylee, as he examines how the place serves as the "place of writing," and thus becomes the "written place" through the poet's imaginative imposition (*The Place of Writing* 36). This thesis is an extension of that focus, as it attempts to investigate Yeats's particular relationship to his tower in greater detail and attention to the Irish context.

As a poet whose work has long been canonized into the great bulk of English poetry, Yeats was clearly indebted to British literary tradition. However, as an Anglo-Irish Protestant in Ireland, his affinity to England had complicated his identity in his native country. While he was generally considered one of the representatives of Irish literature and the "national poet," receiving the 1923 Nobel Prize for his "always inspired poetry, which in a highly artistic form gives expression to the spirit of a whole nation," identification for Yeats was never without its own problems. As I will argue, they are deeply implicated in his conception of and relation to place. In his youth, Yeats often expressed strong nostalgia for his maternal hometown of Sligo and its surroundings. His fascination with the Irish West also led to his dedication to compiling folk tales of the west countryside, and his well-known associations with the Irish West have created the "Yeats Country" in current-day County Sligo in Connacht. However, as

critics have often noted, in his boyhood and adolescence, Yeats was often moving between England and Ireland with his family, and spent relatively little time in his native country. In other words, the sense of belonging and close relationship to the land was largely imaginative. His “authentic” relationship to Ireland was thus often doubted. Since places and place names figure prominently in Yeats’s work, his relation to places and his use of them in his work have often been examined along with topics of identity, aesthetics, or nationality. For instance, Daniel A. Harris’s *Yeats: Coole Park & Ballylee* connects Yeats’s “Coole sequence” with his “Tower sequence” to investigate Yeats’s myth-making in constructing an imaginary space for the two localities. Harris interprets Yeats’s use of the two places as reflecting his often difficult negotiations with his Anglo-Irish identity. In “W. B. Yeats, Space, and Cultural Nationalism,” Jonathan Allison examines how Yeats’s particular sense of place/space can be linked to his early cultural nationalism and his conception of nationality. More recently, in *Yeats’s Poetic Codes*, Nicholas Grene lists Yeats’s use of places and place names to demonstrate Yeats’s reliance on the meanings of place and its name in his work. These approaches tend to focus on the symbolic significance of the place/locality and how it is made manifest in Yeats’s work; however, in presenting general surveys of the importance of place, they often fail to consider the role of specific places and localities, or simply make brief commentaries on them. Therefore, in this thesis, I want to focus on one particular place and examine how it functions in one particular volume of Yeats’s work.

Among the places that Yeats held dear, his Galway tower, Thoor Ballylee, is particularly important, not only because it is the only property he had ever owned, but also because of its rich symbolic and topographic associations. Yeats bought the tower in 1917. As Terence Brown observes in *The Life of W. B. Yeats*, Yeats had “never before owned any property and this toe in the waters of proprietorship gave rich symbolic satisfaction. He was a Yeats acquiring title on a building in the Irish west, close to Coole” (244). In this respect, the acquisition of the tower had strengthened his sense of self-recognition and served as a kind of

solution to the anxiety of disconnectedness that he was feeling around the period. Through his tower, Yeats was able to imagine an authentic relationship to the land, intimately linked to the soil. Moreover, it was situated near Coole Park, which had sustained him both financially and spiritually for almost two decades; the knowledge of this would surely reinforce its importance to him. More importantly, his tower took on aesthetic significance when he made it a declared symbol of his art. As Yeats famously wrote in a letter to T. Sturge Moore, he considered the tower as “a permanent symbol of [his] work plainly visible to the passer-by” (*CL*, 21 September 1927). In other words, he had transformed the historical and material reality of Thoor Ballylee into aspects of his poetic symbol. The potency of this place-turned-symbol is most clearly demonstrated in its namesake poetry collection, *The Tower*, one of Yeats’s finest poetic accomplishments.

Published in 1928, *The Tower* contains poems written roughly between 1919 and 1927,¹ a transitional period in Ireland’s national history. The period saw the drafting of the Irish Declaration of Independence in 1919, the passage of the Government of Ireland Act in 1920, as well as the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921, and the creation of the Irish Free State in 1922. Violence and disorder were often characteristic of the early years of this period: the European War had just ended in 1918, soon followed by the Anglo-Irish War from 1919 to 1921, and the Irish Civil War from 1922 to 1923. Yeats experienced this period witnessing the uncertainties and atrocities of the wars, especially when he was staying in Thoor Ballylee during the Civil War. His meditations on the unfolding events as he contemplated on the violence and chaos they brought also led to an inward-directed questioning of his role as the national artist finding expression for the founding moment of his nation. The poems of *The Tower*, written roughly during this period, thus acutely demonstrate the poet’s agitated

¹ Exceptions include “The New Faces,” which was drafted as early as December 1912 (*Mem* 267), and “Fragments,” which was added to *The Tower* in the 1933 Macmillan *Collected Poems*. For a detailed account of the different versions of *The Tower*, see Finneran, “‘From Things Becoming to the Thing become’: The Construction of W. B. Yeats’s *The Tower*.”

response to the nation's painful birth and to his own doubt about the validity of his role as an artist during a chaotic and transitional period. Since the volume is named after the tower, one of his most important symbols and his rightful property, it is worth investigating how different levels of significance of the tower are presented throughout the collection.

In this study, I argue that Thoor Ballylee completes Yeats's tower symbol by its rich historical and symbolic associations, and that it is transformed by the poet's imagination to become, in both the literal and metaphoric sense, his place of writing. Two levels of meanings are involved in the idea of "the place of writing." On the material level, the actual tower, Thoor Ballylee, was also a place of dwelling for Yeats during most of the 1920s and served domestic functions; in other words, it is the actual "place" where he wrote the poems. On the imaginative level, that physical place is also transformed into a mental space that fortifies the poetic voice, as its historical and symbolic associations are incorporated into the poems to become signposts of the poet's trajectory of thinking. I believe both aspects are indispensable to understanding the complexity of this particular place. This thesis follows the spirit of Heaney's study on Yeats and seeks to tease out the significance of Thoor Ballylee in *The Tower* in terms of its enabling power for the poet. While the significance of the tower as a poetic symbol has been acknowledged by critics, it remains to be examined exactly what the tower is symbol of and how such process of symbolization can be understood in relation to the *Tower* poems, not just one particular poem. In the process, this thesis attempts to answer questions that address the relationship between place and writing: How is the poet's imagination imposed upon the place from which he writes? How has the tower as a symbol been modified to suit the poet's need? What does its location suggest in terms of the relationship between writing and place? How does the poet's established relationship with place fortify his poetic voice in a personally and nationally transitional period? These are some of the questions that this thesis attempts to answer.

To fulfill that end, I propose to read *The Tower* first and foremost as *a text*, in the sense

that its poems, while varying in themes and style, are arranged in such a way as to demonstrate an imaginative journey, a mental space traveled. As Richard Finneran observes, Yeats was attentive to the arrangement of his poems in collected and published forms. The *locus classicus*” (Finneran 36, original emphasis) of that principle, as Finneran points out, is Hugh Kenner’s 1955 seminal essay, “The Sacred Book of the Arts,” in which Kenner argues that Yeats “was an architect, not a decorator; he didn’t accumulate poems, he wrote books” (qtd. in Finneran 36). Likewise, Hazard Adams in his *The Book of Yeats’s Poems* treats the poems as “constituting a book,” which is shaped in a certain way to tell a story (x). I believe the same principle applies to individual collections, as well. While a poem is often considered a “well-wrought urn,” existing independently by itself, my purpose in considering the inter-connectedness of the *Tower* poems is mainly to highlight the integrity and unity of the volume as a whole. For while individual studies on single poems have accumulated quite formidably, studies on the overall design of *The Tower* remains relatively inadequate. David Young’s *Troubled Mirror: A Study of Yeats’s The Tower*, published in 1987, is perhaps still one of the most thorough studies on the structure of the volume. However, Young’s treatment of *The Tower* mainly employs a classification of overarching themes in the collection, which does not adequately explain the sequencing of the poems; moreover, the version of *The Tower* that Young uses is in fact a mixture of different versions, which I believe cannot fully account for Yeats’s careful design of the collection. By employing the idea of “the place of writing” to *The Tower*, I hope to offer clues to a better understanding of *The Tower* as a text and to provide new interpretations for its careful design.

As I have just mentioned, Young’s version of *The Tower* is problematic. In fact, commentaries on the overall design of *The Tower* inevitably involve the problem of versions. As Finneran’s study on different versions of *The Tower* demonstrates, during Yeats’s lifetime, he had produced four different versions of *The Tower* between 1928 and 1933, altering the sequence and contents of several poems. Finneran argues that by doing so, Yeats had shifted

the emphasis of *The Tower* and the whole of his collected poems. It is when Yeats was preparing the 1933 edition of the Macmillan *Collected Poems* that he made most of the important changes to the contents and sequence of *The Tower*. For instance, a long poem, “The Gift of Harun Al-Rashid,” originally published as the penultimate poem in the 1928 edition of *The Tower*, was moved out of collection and placed in the “Narrative and Dramatic” section in the 1933 *Collected Poems*, in fact becoming the concluding poem to the *Collected Poems*. Yeats also added “Fragments” and a fourth part to “Two Songs from a Play.” These changes all have significant impact on the overall impression produced by *The Tower* (and surely, by the *Collected Poems*, as well). In the present study, I follow Finneran’s edition of *The Tower* because I believe that the 1933 edition of *Collected Poems* represents Yeats’s final decision for the sequencing of his poetry. Editorial differences will doubtlessly always persist; however, it is not the purpose of this study to address such a complicated and controversial issue. By adopting Finneran’s edition of *The Tower*, I work with the new order and contents Yeats had wished for *The Tower* to appear in the 1933 *Collected Poems*, instead of the 1928 version or other versions preferred by other editors. For the convenience of reference, however, citations of the poems in this study will be indicated as they appear in the Variorum Edition.

The body of this thesis is divided into three chapters. Chapter one offers a background survey of the context in which the poems in *The Tower* were written. This chapter attempts to shed light on the transitions taking place both in Yeats’s personal life and in Ireland’s national history, and to offer interpretations of their correspondence. I discuss important events that had motivated Yeats’s return to the political and cultural center of Dublin in the 1920s. Taking the year 1915 as a crossroad moment in Yeats’s personal life, I consider two major decisions he made that had prompted his return. The first is his purchase of the Norman Tower at Ballylee in County Galway from the Congested Districts Board in late March, 1917. Harris points out that when Yeats “took title to the islanded tower and its adjoining cottages, he

began the actual and symbolic reconstruction of his life” (92). The second is his marriage to Georgina Hyde-Lees in October of the same year. Married life had promised the possibility of progeny and thus a sense of continuity, liberating him from the disconnectedness expressed in the 1914 collection *Responsibilities*. Moreover, through joint occult experiments with his wife, which brought him “metaphors for poetry” (*VB* 8), Yeats was able to systemize experience and theorize his philosophy about personalities and history in *A Vision*. These two decisions are in fact inextricably connected, and they both prepared Yeats for his reengagement with the Ireland of the 1920s. On the historical level, the 1920s is perhaps one of the most turbulent periods in Irish history. The 1916 Easter Rising had in many ways steered public sentiment towards more violent ways of gaining independence. The Anglo-Irish War soon followed the European War in 1919. The 1921 Treaty did not bring conclusive peace but instead buried the seeds for more civil strife to come in the Civil War, which lasted from 1922 to 1923. These public events deeply affected Yeats, and also prompted him to meditate on his responsibility and role as the national poet in a time of crisis. At the same time, especially towards the latter half of the 1920s, he was beginning to feel the strain of growing conservatism in the new Irish Free State, which led to his strengthened identification with his Anglo-Irish heritage.

In the second chapter, I will first focus on the symbolic associations of the tower image, approaching from two most relevant aspects, the literary and the esoteric. Since Yeats is greatly indebted to his British literary predecessors, his adoption of the tower symbol from Milton and Shelley as representing lonely philosophic retreat should not come as a surprise. However, his use of these inherited associations in his poems, such as “The Phases of the Moon,” in fact points to his desire to challenge these received meanings and to re-invent the symbol as distinctly his own. On the other hand, since Yeats had once been an Adept in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, his knowledge of and interest in the esoteric and the Tarot pack, which he also owned, make it possible to consider his tower symbol in terms of

the associated meanings of the Tower Trump in the Major Arcana of the Tarot pack. In the Tarot, The Tower suggests a moment of imminent change, favorably as inspiration from above, unfavorably as apocalyptic destruction, which serves as a suitable analogy to the atmosphere of the 1920s. However, what really links Yeats's tower symbol indelibly to his Norman tower is the metaphoric topography of Thoor Ballylee. The building corresponds to his wish to be "rooted" in historic Irish soil. I argue that it is because the tower has a real referent in the ancient building that it is so unique among Yeats's poetic symbols. In the latter part of the chapter, I examine the titular poem, "The Tower," in terms of how Thoor Ballylee becomes "the place of writing" for Yeats, and how it is made symbolic of Yeats's indomitable poetic voice. Through the poet's imaginative imposition, it also becomes the "written place" in his work.

Chapter three begins with a close reading of "Meditations in Time of Civil War," a sequence of seven parts written in Thoor Ballylee during the Civil War. I want to show that Yeats's poetic vision constantly dwells on conflicting views and antithetical formulations. Therefore, the seemingly established fortitude of the poetic voice, represented by the tower image, is openly questioned in the sequence. The sequence also highlights Yeats's readiness to acknowledge the inevitability of destruction and his belief in the coexistence of construction and destruction. While there is no direct mention of Thoor Ballylee in *The Tower* after this sequence, I argue that the place has entered so deeply into his imagination that it was no longer simply a literal place of writing, but a mental space from which the poetic voice can issue forth. In "Meditations in Time of Civil War," we see Yeats doubting his own belief, which shows his courage to face the possible void underneath his cherished conviction. It is such strength of the mind that enables him to carry on the imaginative journey of *The Tower* instead of sinking into total dejection. "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" is the last of the first four (mis)dated poems, and completes the poet's "dreaming back" in time to relive the recent violence and horror in Ireland. This sequence relentlessly questions the role of the

national artist and his cherished artistic isolation. In the end, human violence seems to remain irresolvable. However, the tone of self-debasement in the sequence should alert us to the effort with which the poet attempts to adopt a critically detached perspective in contemplating Ireland's recent past. The poetic voice that emerges from the first four poems will be one that is able to continue the imaginative journey in repeated disengagement and reengagement with the immediate present, demonstrated in "Leda and the Swan," "On a Picture of a Black Centaur by Edmund Dulac," and "Among School Children." In the last of the three, Yeats finally emerges as the Irish Free State senator, identifying with his public role. He is now able to imagine the ideal image for the unity of being both of the state and the individual. *The Tower*, at its close in "All Souls' Night," concludes with the tranquil and inward-directed contemplation of "the mind's wandering," in a space and time imaginatively removed from the Irish present. The equanimity with which *The Tower* ends demonstrates the contentment at the end of a journey through which the poet has achieved an imaginative refashioning of the self.

With this thesis, my purpose is mainly to show how the poems can be understood both in their achievements as poetic meditations on seemingly irresolvable human enigmas, and as critically removed commentaries on the chaotic historical times. I draw from historical context when necessary because I believe that some poems in *The Tower* in particular should be considered along their historical context. However, I do not want to prioritize the historical context over the work of art. Nor do I want to argue with the political or ideological positions of the poems. I share Helen Vendler's view as she argues:

[P]oems are hypothetical sites of speculations, not position papers. They do not exist on the same plane as actual life; they are not votes, they are not uttered from a podium or a pulpit, they are not essays. They are products of reverie. They are expert experiments in imagining symbols for a state of affairs, and of arranging language to suit; they are not propositions to be agreed or disagreed with. (*Our Secret Discipline*

xiv)

Therefore, in my investigation of the poems, I pay close attention to their *form* and *style*, an approach greatly indebted to Vendler's assiduous and insightful study on Yeats's lyric form. While the thesis mainly examines *The Tower*, I also draw from other first-hand resources when necessary, which includes Yeats's letters, *Autobiographies*, *Memoirs*, and *A Vision*, among others. With *A Vision*, I must stress that it will be chiefly cited to support readings of the poems when necessary, for I do not venture to engage in detailed explication of Yeats's *Vision* system. As R. F. Foster suggests, Yeats's "idiosyncratic philosophy [in *A Vision*]...provided a symbolic language rather than an analytical structure" (365). *A Vision* represents Yeats's stylistic arrangement of experience, and indeed elucidates many otherwise obscure postulations in the poems. However, since my focus is *The Tower*, ideas in *A Vision* will only be cited or used when they are either indispensable to or greatly enhances the understanding of the poems.

As one of Yeats's most highly acclaimed poetry collections, *The Tower* has received enormously accumulated critical attention in the Yeatsian scholarship. By re-examining the poems in terms of how the tower as symbol of art and place of writing renders its enabling power for the poetic voice facing the "filthy modern tide" (VP 610), this study hopes to provide new vantage points from which to read and appreciate these much canonized and anthologized works of art.

Chapter One

Returning to the Center

This chapter investigates the context that stimulated many of the themes and concerns of *The Tower*, including Ireland's continuing struggle for independence, civil unrest in the new Free State, Yeats's own troubled emotional states before and after his marriage, the studies and experiments that produced *A Vision*, and his intensified identification with his Anglo-Irish Protestant heritage in the growing conservative and hegemonizing ideology of the Irish Free State in the 1920s. By outlining major changes in Yeats's attitudes towards Ireland and the forces that helped produce them, I want to show how Yeats moved back to the Irish cultural and political center, and how this return had required him to re-examine his role in his native country, as new challenges and crises surfaced. These investigations are presented in order to provide a more comprehensive background to study *The Tower*. As I have mentioned, the period during which most poems in *The Tower* were written was also one that saw Ireland's painful struggle for independence and the troubled divisions after the emergence of the new nation. Therefore, *The Tower* can also be seen as a record of Yeats's meditations on the local Irish context. In this respect, it has particular aesthetic and historical importance both to the poet and to Ireland. As a volume that astonished Yeats with its "bitterness" after its publication (*CL*, to Olivia Shakespear, 25 April 1928), *The Tower* also gains much of its power from that bitterness. As Virginia Woolf commented after its publication: "Mr. Yeats has never written more exactly and more passionately" (*Mm* xl). To better grasp its complexity and the extensiveness of its concerns, we can start by looking at the challenges and frustration that Yeats confronted. Although the majority of poems in *The Tower* were composed during the 1920s, we must go further back in order to understand how the changes in the 1920s were engendered.

Yeats turned fifty in 1915. In the previous year, he had finished writing the first part of

his memoir, *Reveries over Childhood and Youth*, published in 1916 and later included in *Autobiographies*. The final section of *Reveries* concludes in a dejected tone:

For some months now I have lived with my own youth and childhood, not always writing indeed but thinking of it almost everyday, and I am sorrowful and disturbed. It is not that I have accomplished too few of my plans, for I am not ambitious; but when I think of all the books I have read, and of the wise words I have heard spoken, and of the anxiety I have given to parents and grandparents, and of the hopes that I have had, all life weighed in the scales of my own life seems to me a preparation for something that never happens. (*Au* 108)

For a memoir that records childhood and adolescence, the apparent sense of disappointment and unfulfillment is striking. This concluding section reflects his dejection as he was reminiscing the first twenty years of his life; it also indicates how much he was still concerned with the frustration and regrets of the past. Brooding on the past was for him to revisit old disappointments. Terence Brown has pointed out the book's "strange lack of emotional zest, as if the isolation and uninvolvedness of the mature Yeats in the general crisis of the autumn of 1914 extends its influence to the recollection of his own childhood and youth" (219). Brown further observes that Yeats "chose to ignore the grim horror of the present but could not find in his past a source of imaginative renewal" (219). By "general crisis" Brown is referring to the European War, on which Yeats deliberately remained silent. In a letter to Henry James in August 1915, Yeats included the poem "A Reason for Keeping Silent," adding that "[it] is the only poem I will write of the war or will write" (*CL*, 20 August 1915). The poem, which he later revised and included in *The Wild Swans at Coole* under the title "On Being Asked for a War Poem," shows Yeats's attitude towards the European War, which he considered as "bloody frivolity," and provides a clue to his belief that art and politics should be separated: "I think it better that in times like these / We poets keep our

mouth shut, for in truth / We have no gift to set a statesman right” (*CL*, 20 August 1915).²

A closer look at Yeats’s life up to 1915, especially at the turn of the twentieth century, allows for a better understanding of his sense of unfulfillment and his deliberately maintained distance from Irish politics and involvement in public affairs in general. During the first three decades of his life, Yeats had envisioned a cultural movement that would revive the traditional Celtic past, which he considered to be distinctively Irish and could be utilized to cultivate a cultural unity in Ireland. With the help of Lady Gregory, he collected and published folk tales during the late 1890s and the early 1900s, finding in them “beautiful, pleasant, and significant things” that would allow him to “show in a vision something of the face of Ireland to any of [his] own people who would look where [he] bid[s] them” (*CT* 11). Yeats’s preoccupation with Irish folklore and the revival of Irish literature has contributed to what is known as the Celtic Renaissance. He was also one of the founding members of the Abbey Theater, which, when established in 1904, proclaimed to “build up a Celtic and Irish school of dramatic literature” and to “find in Ireland an uncorrupted audience trained to listen by its passion for oratory” (Gregory 8-9). With the younger Yeats, critics have often identified a belief of Irish cultural nationalism. The objective of such nationalism, as David Lloyd argues, was “to forge a sense of national identity in Irish subjects such that their own personal identity would be fulfilled only in the creation of the nation” (69). It follows that the artist, as a representative of the voice of the yet-to-be nation, must have “a total ethical and cultural identification with the nation” (69). However, with Yeats, such total identification was never easy or even possible. His much embittered frustration at the Abbey rows, mainly over Synge’s *Playboy of the Western World* in 1907, and Synge’s untimely death in 1909, left him disappointed with his Dublin audience and also strengthened his determination not to “talk down to a popular audience” (Foster 11). The Hugh Lane art gallery fiasco in 1913 further

² The poem was first published in *The Book of the Homeless* (edited by Edith Wharton as part of her war relief efforts) in 1916. Yeats later revised the poem, and in *The Wild Swans at Coole* the second line reads “A poet’s mouth be silent” (*VP* 359).

distanced him from Dublin society, as Ireland's middle-class Catholics became the target of his belligerent attack in poems such as "September, 1913" and "To a Shade."

"Romantic Ireland" may have been dead and gone for Yeats in 1913, as he spent most of his time between Woburn Buildings in London and Coole Park in Galway, determined to keep away from the political and cultural center of Dublin. In fact, the antagonism and seemingly unbridgeable distance that he felt towards his native country are not too surprising or unpredictable. Although he and his friends believed they had toiled for the awakening of true Irish spirit through joint enterprise such as the Abbey Theater, to suspicious Irish Catholics, mostly middle-class, these efforts were considered as arrogant imposition by Protestant artists of what they deemed as art on the general public. And in Yeats's case, he cannot be totally excused from this arrogance, particularly because of his fascination with the aristocratic way—control and guidance from the above, order, and harmony. Moreover, behind his animosity lies a sustained and unresolved conflict of identification. Being an Anglo-Irish Protestant underlies his minority status and interstitial position, which creates tension that is strengthened by his relations to different places and the societies he chose to be involved.

Foster argues that around 1915 Yeats was "[standing] at a crossroad in his life" (xxiv), a statement that holds true if we consider the events that were soon to take place around him shortly afterwards. During the first half of the 1910s, Yeats deliberately kept out of Dublin society. He was then absorbed by spiritual mediumship, psychic experiments, and occult communication (Brown 190-191), and was also writing his memoir. Around 1915, he was spending time with Ezra Pound at Stone Cottage in Sussex, where he was introduced to the Japanese Noh plays and found much to admire. Both the countryside and the Noh drama proved to be invigorative and restorative for him, as he enjoyed peace and newly found inspiration. In a letter to Mabel Beardsley in January 1915, he wrote: "I always long for a life of routine & seldom attain it but here I shall have it & that will make the life of my thoughts

much more vehement” (*CL*, 7 January 1915). At Stone Cottage, he found himself coming in from his walks “full of thoughts” (*CL*, 7 January 1915). Edward Larrissy further points out that for Yeats, the Noh “was by no means merely an instigation to technical experiment”; rather, it “allowed Yeats to link themes of tradition, family, the spirit world, desire and the possible void at the heart of human existence in what seemed to him a coherent way” (115). The Noh also links ideas of aristocratic elitism to Yeats’s projected ideal audience—limited, learned, and sharing his interests. Its elaborate use of masks would also fascinate him, reinforcing his theory of the mask and the anti-self, which dominates his evolving thought and philosophy for the rest of his life. Yeats’s first Noh play, *At the Hawk’s Well*, was first performed in 1916 in London, and he was quite pleased with the achieved effects. In “Certain Noble Plays of Japan,” he wrote of his newly-invented drama form, which he considered “distinguished, indirect, and symbolic, and having no need of mob or Press to pay its way—an aristocratic form” (*E&I* 221). The apparent satisfaction was both with the work and with the audience. Unlike the Dublin society that left him disappointed, the literary society in London provided him with the comforts and artistic privilege he was looking for.

However, the undisturbed distance from Irish life was soon to be shortened by the Easter Rising in 1916, an event that is both a turning point for Ireland’s national history and for Yeats’s life. As the following study will demonstrate, during the turbulent years of struggle and war, Yeats’s changing relations to different places can be seen to mirror his growing concern for Ireland. The early years of the 1910s saw him consciously staying out of Dublin society; however, the changes and crises brought by the Easter Rising initiated a process of return to the cultural and political center, and prompted new commitment and responsibilities. Different from the cultural-nationalistically minded years, the middle-aged Yeats took up the challenge in a more direct and assertive way, an attitude that will be carried on throughout his later years, and is ostensibly reflected in his mature work.

Unlike his rather cool and distant attitude towards the European War, Yeats’s response

to the Easter Rising was agitated and troubled. Although the event affected him greatly, he was cautious in making his response public, well aware of his interstitial position and the complications it involves. Much as he expressed in personal correspondences feelings of regret and shock over the “Dublin tragedy,” for instance in a much quoted letter to Lady Gregory: “I had no idea that any public event could so deeply move me—& I am very despondent about the future. At the moment I feel that all the work of years has been overturned [:] all the bringing together of classes, all the freeing of Irish literature & criticism from politics” (*CL*, 11 May 1916), or much as he lamented in an elevated tone over the executions—“[w]e have lost the ablest & most fine natured of our young men” (*CL*, to John Quinn, 23 May 1916)—both in public pronouncements and in verse he refrained palpably from a total recognition with the Rising and the violent way it was carried out. Yet, as his famous “Easter, 1916” refrains, all is indeed “changed, changed utterly” (*VP* 392). The ambiguity in this poem is impossible to miss, not only in the seemingly incompatible and troubling combination of “terrible” and “beauty,” presenting moral and aesthetic judgment simultaneously, but also in Yeats’s strategy of questioning in the last stanza. Vendler points out that the poem traces his changing states of mind: from regret to pain to bafflement, finally to a carefully positioned series of judgment (*Our Secret Discipline* 22). This process also reflects the actual changes in Yeats’s attitude towards Ireland and the position he decided to adopt. He sensed that “a world seems to have been swept away,” and among the uncertainties felt that he should “return to Dublin to live, to begin building again,” although almost immediately confessed that he “dread the temptation to controversy one finds in Dublin” (*CL*, to John Quinn, 23 May 1916). Nevertheless, the Rising did shift his concern back to Ireland, as renewed interests in and re-directed concerns for Irish matters found their way into the decisions he made in the ensuing years. As Anthony Roche observes: “[t]he effect of the Easter Rising on Yeats was to move him to a closer connection with Ireland” (94). Most significantly, two personal decisions would tremendously influence his life: first, he

purchased Ballylee Castle, which he later renamed as “Thoor Ballylee,” in March 1917; secondly, he married Georgina Hyde-Lees in October of the same year. These two events proved to be the defining events at the crossroad moment in Yeats’s life. In the following section, I will highlight the significance of these two decisions.

Yeats had written of the Ballylee area as early as in *The Celtic Twilight*. In ““Dust Hath Closed Helen’s Eye,”” dated 1900, he recalled:

I have been to a little group of houses, not many enough to be called a village, in the barony of Kiltartan in County Galway, whose name, Ballylee, is known through all the west of Ireland. There is the old square castle, Ballylee, inhabited by a farmer and his wife, and a cottage...and old ash trees throwing green shadows upon a little river and great stepping-stones. (CT 33)

The castle, dating back to the thirteenth and fourteenth century, is one of the thirty-two fortified residences (variously known as “castles,” “keeps,” or “towers”) built by the Norman Family de Burgo, or Burke. After its latest residents, the Spellmans, gave up residence there, the castle became part of the Gregory estate, until the Congested Districts Board acquired it for redistribution of land (Hanley and Miller 9-12). The castle appealed to Yeats immensely by its severity and antiquity. He was also charmed by the thought of the local beauty, Mary Hynes, “the shining flower of Ballylee” (CT 37) celebrated by the Gaelic poet Raftery in verse, who had once lived there. These details of the castle’s history would later be incorporated into the titular poem of *The Tower*, becoming emblems of his place of writing. Yeats’s renewed interest in Ballylee Castle in 1915, as Robert Gregory suggested to him that he should consider buying it (Foster 17), was expressed in a letter to Lady Gregory, in which he told her that he was “quite serious about Ballylee” but “cannot bid for it now [1915]” due to his father’s financial difficulties in New York. In a 1916 letter to the influential trustee, William F. Bailey, Yeats inquired over the possibility of purchasing the castle:

For years I have coveted Ballylee Castle.... It has got a tolerably good roof on it, good

rough old Elizabethan chimney pieces, and I could restore it to some of its original stern beauty.... At present it is worth nothing to anybody, and will soon become ruinous, and that will make the neighbourhood the poorer of romance.” (*CL*, 2 Oct 1916)

The words he used to describe the castle, such as original, stern, and romance, hint at the values Yeats saw in acquiring the otherwise plain and almost uninhabitable castle: an ancient rootedness in history, which echoed his fascination with Irish folk culture. Yeats’s negotiations with the Congested Districts Board continued from late October 1916 to March 1917, until he finally settled for a price of £35, which he considered a “very small sum” (*CL*, to John Butler Yeats, 13 Feb 1917)—and indeed it was, compared with the money he later had to spend on the restoration work.

Brown observes that “[Yeats] had never before [the purchase of Ballylee Castle] owned any property and this toe in the waters of proprietorship gave rich symbolic satisfaction. He was a Yeats acquiring title on a building in the Irish west, close to Coole” (244). The emphasis here is on the sense of having one’s own place, a place in the Irish west and close to Coole, which had long sustained him spiritually and financially. To John Butler Yeats, the acquisition of this tower suited his son well. In a personal correspondence, he wrote of his son’s acquisition: “He says he will live no longer in London but in Castle Ballylee—henceforth I shall mention my son—not as a poet but as my son of Castle Ballylee in the County Galway—so please congratulate me. (It has cost very little—& possibly no-one could live in it. Except a Poet.)” (qtd. in Foster 86). He was pleased, as he wrote to his son: “It is all a symbol of the poetical life, a thirst for the soil, and you have it to the centre of the earth. It is in Ireland, another thirst instinctive, and therefore of the poet. And it is old, therefore again a poet’s desire” (qtd. in Jeffares 219). To Yeats, the tower was one among “the only signified buildings left in Ireland,” and he was greatly pleased with its “perfect” winding stair (*CL*, to Florence Farr, 5 March 1917). Harris argues that when Yeats “took title to the

islanded tower and its adjoining cottages, he began the actual and symbolic reconstruction of his life” (92). In the following years, he would indeed “start building,” as he waited for the completion of the renovated tower, at the same time starting to re-shape his idea of nation-building during the tumultuous times. The tower would become more than a symbol of his art; it would become “the place of writing,” as Seamus Heaney calls it, with its locally and historically rich connections incorporated and transformed into the poems.

However, Yeats’s tower would not have such an indispensable role in his later life without his wife. In fact, he had once hesitated over the purchase out of practical concern.³ Brenda Maddox argues that for Yeats, “the ‘castle’ and marriage were entwined in his mind” before both events really took place (23). In a sense, Yeats’s marriage in late 1917 truly made it possible for him to convert his tower into a permanent symbol of his work. Brown terms his marriage to Georgina Hyde-Lees (hereafter referred to as George) an “occult marriage” (246), but its significance extends well beyond the occult. George’s automatic writing, initially attempted to divert her newly-wed husband’s troubled mind from Iseult Gonne, became the medium through which Yeats communicated with his “Instructors,” and they produced, between 1917 and 1920, over 3,600 pages of automatic script in 450 sittings (Harper x). These automatic scripts were later laboriously compiled into *A Vision* (1925), arguably Yeats’s most thorough occult investigations and attempts to systemize history and personalities according to his invented phases of the moon. Joseph M. Hassett argues that the principle significance of the automatic writing was “not as the source of a particular word or image, but as the basis for Yeats’s belief that direct communication from the spiritual world had confirmed the validity of his thinking about the relationship between the material and spiritual worlds and the nature of his creative process” (151). In a way, Yeats was finally able to confirm his held belief in the connection between the material world and the spiritual

³ In a 1915 letter he confessed “[i]f I remain unmarried I would find [Ballylee] useless (I am too blind for the country alone & too fond of company)” (CL, to Lady Gregory, 29 Jan 1915).

world, and his long involvement in the occult societies and activities had partly proved to have their reward. In a later poem, "Fragments," he made it explicit: "Where got I that truth? / Out of a medium's mouth" (*VP* 439). Moreover, the experience of the automatic sessions and the results they generate had, as Brown argues, "the aesthetic consequences of...[marking a] reorientation of his poetry towards present vital, challenging experience instead of towards the past and its disappointments and failures in love, which had been so much in his mind since 1914, when he had begun to compose his autobiography" (266). Even after his marriage, memories of the past still haunted him for some time, including frustration and lingering obsession with the Gones. The emotional turmoil is present in *The Wild Swans at Coole* all the way through *The Tower*, showing how much his mind was still brooding on the recent frustrations in his personal life. However, married life had brought him some measure of peace and a reinvigorated surge of creativity, partly attributable to the stimulus from their joint occult experiments. Moreover, in his poems, Yeats had come to associate George with wisdom, intellect, and domestic peace, all of which are traits that could not be found in his previous love affairs. For the then over fifty-year-old Yeats, marriage had brought a sense of settling down and made possible the thought of posterity and offspring.

Two poems published in 1918 in *The Little Review* and later collected in *The Wild Swans at Coole*, "Under the Round Tower" and "Solomon to Sheba," can be seen as Yeats's secret celebration of his marriage and the occult wisdom it has brought. In the ballad "Under the Round Tower," Billy Byrne, sleeping on his great-grandfather's tomb at the monastic site of Glendalough, dreams about the sun and the moon as king and queen dancing and singing in the round tower. The round tower is a tower in the Glendalough monastery, County Wicklow, but Yeats's own tower could not have been far from his mind (*P* 558). The "golden king and silver lady" spiraling up all the way to the top of the winding stair also refer to Yeats and his wife, dancing in harmonious unity,

Bellowing up and bellowing round,

Till toes mastered a sweet measure,
Mouth mastered a sweet sound,
Prancing round and prancing up
Until they pranced upon the top. (*VP* 331)

While the attempt at fusing high cosmic ideas and popular (low) diction is not too effective in this ballad (Vendler, *Discipline* 119-120), the celebration of perfect sexual union through the image of sun and moon and the joy and satisfaction it brings is significant. The ascent up the tower away from the common world is a typical Yeatsian expression of reaching wisdom, a “mystical ascension” made possible by the associations of the tower symbol (Leavitt 138). “Solomon to Sheba” further hints at the wisdom brought by George and their married life by joining love with wisdom. In the Bible story, Solomon’s wisdom and the prosperity of his kingdom are greatly admired by Sheba. In Yeats’s poem, he projects the persona of Solomon and Sheba as himself and his wife. In fact, his association of the two figures dated back to 1909, when in a journal entry he had written:

It seems to me that love, if it is fine, is essentially a discipline, but it needs so much wisdom that the love of Solomon and Sheba must have lasted for all the silence of the Scriptures. In wise love each divines the high secret self of the other and, refusing to believe in the mere daily self, creates a mirror where the lover or the beloved sees an image to copy in daily life. Love also creates the mask.” (*Mem* 144-145)

Ideal love is thus imagined as capable of producing the mask that allows one to assume the anti-self. Cast in dialogue form, “Solomon to Sheba” has Solomon sing to Sheba: “All day long from shadowless noon / We have gone round and round / In the narrow theme of love” (*VP* 332-333); however, the “narrow theme of love,” as Sheba humbles herself by calling her thoughts “a narrow pound,” is only an understated way to express the exaltation in the union of the two in achieved wisdom. In the final stanza, Solomon boldly declares,

‘There’s not a man or woman

Born under the skies
Dare match in learning with us two,
And all day long we have found
There's not a thing but love can make
The world a narrow pound.' (*VP* 333)

By projecting his wife and himself as the Bible figures whose union he had long associated with the attainment of wisdom, Yeats acknowledges the inspiration and new medium to mystical knowledge that his wife had brought into his life.

Yeats's first celebration of the tower and his married life appears in "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory," one of the elegy poems he wrote on the death of Lady Gregory's son, who was shot down when returning from a mission in Italy in 1918. The poem purports to be motivated by having settled down in his newly acquired tower:

Now that we're almost settled in our house
I'll name the friends that cannot sup with us
Beside a fire of turf in th' ancient tower,
And having talked to some late hour
Climb up the narrow winding stair to bed (*VP* 323-324)

The setting is important here. It shows Yeats, for the first time, assuming the role of the host and owner of the house, ready to welcome his imaginary visitors. In a roll-call manner, he recalls old friends who represent, respectively, three types of accomplishment: scholarly learning, artistic creativity, and physical energy, before introducing Robert Gregory as "[o]ur Sidney and our perfect man" (*VP* 325), in whom the aforementioned qualities are united. As an elegy, it differs much in tone and content from its predecessor, "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death." While the earlier poem projects the speaker's (Robert Gregory) impartiality towards both sides of the War, showing him solely driven by a "lonely impulse of delight" (*VP* 328) to face death, "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory" is much more personal in

terms of Yeats's incorporation of *his* memories of old friends. Vendler also reads the poem as a concealed ("superseded") epithalamion, pointing out that not until the final stanza does Yeats reveal his original intention of introducing friends whom he wished he could have invited to meet his bride (*Discipline* 295-297). The poem shows that Yeats was beginning to incorporate the changes in his life—the acquisition of the tower and his marriage—into his work. These changes are not merely new backgrounds for his poems; they also helped shape his evolving thoughts and strengthened his growing concern for family, unity, and tradition.

In "A Prayer on Going into My House," the idea of inherited tradition is stressed and explicitly connected to the tower. Yeats prays that "God grant a blessing on this tower and cottage / And on my heirs, if all remain unspoiled" and that he may spend "portions of the year" only thinking or reading "...what the great and passionate have used / Throughout so many varying centuries / We take it for the norm" (*VP* 371). The wish to preserve the building also extends to its surroundings, which are valued more than their material existence as tree or cottage, because they are all part of the ancient "stern beauty" of the neighborhood:

...and should some limb of the Devil

Destroy the view by cutting down the ash

That shades the road, or setting up a cottage

Planned in a government office, shorten his life,

Manacle his soul upon the Red Sea Bottom. (*VP* 372)

The poem is also one of the first instances in which a direct mention (and the possibility) of heirs is present in his poems. The determination shown by way of curse in this poem also appears in the draft version of "To Be Carved on a Stone at Thoor Ballylee," which was included in a 1918 letter to John Quinn:

I, the poet, William Yeats,

With common sedge and broken slates

And smithy work from the Gort forge,

Restored this tower for my wife George;
And on my heirs I lay a curse
If they should alter for the worse,
From fashion or an empty mind,
What Raftery built and Scott designed. (*CL*, 23 July 1918)

The deliberate mention of “Gort” is not merely for the purpose of rhyme. It strengthens the sense of place (Gort is a town in Galway, near Coole and Ballylee) and adds connection to the traditions that still existed in the Irish west. The idea of his heirs—thus the continuation of the family name and his line—is inextricably bound to the house, and the future prospect of his descendents are closely identified with the preservation of the tower and the tradition it represented. Married life has brought the prospect of family, liberating him from the disconnectedness expressed in the preface poem of *Responsibilities* in 1914:

Pardon that for a barren passion’s sake,
Although I have come close on forty-nine,
I have no child, I have nothing but a book,
Nothing but that to prove your blood and mine. (*VP* 270)

Yeats’s daughter, Anne, was born in 1919, and his son, Michael, in 1921, making him no longer “childless” (*The Municipal Gallery Revisited*). Established with property, family, and a substantial literary reputation, Yeats was ready to face the challenges of the tumultuous times of the 1920s with a new assertiveness and determination. As the events of the 1920s brought along uncertainties and doubt, there also emerged a sense of anxiety over the future of his tower and posterity. The changed moods and a sense of foreboding will be reflected in poems composed during the tumultuous period.

For the last three years of the 1910s, Yeats and his wife were busy with plans to make Ballylee tower inhabitable. They also continued their intensive occult experiments to schematize historical cycles and personalities. Meanwhile, Europe was undergoing the throes

of social and political changes. In Russia, revolution in November 1917 was followed by civil wars in 1918; in Eastern Europe, the collapse of the Hapsburg Empire resulted in more disorders in the Austro-Hungary area; revolution in Germany expedited the armistice in late 1918 that concluded the European War. In Ireland, although conscription was never carried out, it had contributed to heightened anti-British sentiments that were among the Irish populace since the 1916 Easter Rising, which had already steered public opinion away from anticipating the passing of Home Rule Bill and toward more violent approaches to gain independence. As the European War further postponed the possibility of Home Rule, hard-line advocates of independence and republicanism took to direct military conflicts. Guerilla wars that were determinedly fought inaugurated a period of domestic turbulence in Ireland. The Anglo-Irish War that lasted from 1919 to 1921 became the decisive event that eventually brought about independence, but it also generated further divisions and antagonism. Conventionally dated from 21 January 1919 to the truce established on 11 July 1921, the Anglo-Irish War was first ignited by the killing of two British policemen in Soloheadbeg, County Tipperary by members of the IRA. For the two and a half years that followed, the IRA carried out guerilla wars with the British “Auxiliaries,” otherwise notoriously known as the “Black and Tans” for the design of their uniform. During the wars, retaliatory conduct was common on both sides, which only intensified resentment and furthered violence in malicious repetitions.

During this period, Yeats had mainly stayed outside of Ireland, taking lodgings in Oxford and only spending the summers at Ballylee, partly worried about the ongoing war, partly because his tower was yet to be readied. Shortly before the ratification of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, he wrote to Shakespear with a sense of foreboding, expressing his “deep gloom” over the future: “I see no hope of escape from bitterness.... When men are very bitter, death & ruin draw them on as a rabbit is supposed to be drawn on by the dancing of the fox” (*CL*, 22 Dec 1921). However, despite the sense of foreboding, Yeats’s public pronouncement

left no doubt regarding his loyalty to his native country. It was during this period of national crisis that he decided to publish the poems on the Easter Rising, including “Easter, 1916,” “Sixteen Dead Men,” and “The Rose Tree,” which were previously withheld from publication.⁴ By publishing these highly politically-charged poems that echo his indictment of British atrocities in late 1920, shortly after a random killing in Gort and later intensifying violence in Dublin, Yeats was making his position and loyalty clear. Especially, “Easter, 1916” was published in the London-based *The New Statesman*, and the irony of “Was it needless death after all? / For England may keep faith / For all that is done and said” (VP 394) could not have been missed. Conor Cruise O’Brien, in his influential essay “Passion and Cunning: An Essay on the Politics of W. B. Yeats,” portrays Yeats as combining passion and a strategic cunning in political matters. Regarding Yeats’s publishing strategy in 1920, O’Brien observes that “[t]o publish [the three poems] in this context [1920] was a political act, and a bold one; probably the boldest of Yeats’s career” (239), although he tempers this judgment quickly by pointing out Yeats’s apparent caution: “Yeats’s indignation was spontaneous: his method of giving expression to that indignation in his published writings seems calculated” (240). O’Brien maintains that Yeats’s publishing strategy is calculated to keep him at a safe distance and that he “closed no doors in terms of contemporary politics” (240). However, this judgment lacks sympathy and underestimates the effects produced by such publishing strategy. O’Brien’s argument was later countered by critics who identified an unmistakable loyalty in Yeats’s case. For instance, Elizabeth Cullingford cites a report in the *Freeman’s Journal* on Yeats’s 1921 speech at the Oxford Union, during which he “broke the political silence...with words of scathing denunciation on England’s treatment of Ireland” (qtd. in Cullingford, *Yeats, Ireland, and Fascism* 108) and argues that “Yeats’s fierce speech left his hearers in no doubt as to where his sympathies lay” (109). Brown also contends that Yeats

⁴ “Easter, 1916” was first published in the London-published *The New Statesman* on 23 October 1920; “Sixteen Dead Men” and “The Rose Tree” were first published in *The Dial* in the United States in November 1920. These poems were later included in the 1921 *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*.

was “making his loyalties clear at a defining moment, in a way that bespeaks a more resolute national commitment than O’Brien allows” (277).

The Anglo-Irish Treaty signed on 6 December 1921 was the result of negotiations between the Lloyd George coalition government and the Irish delegates, including Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith. The Treaty gave Ireland equal “constitutional status in the Community of Nations known as the British Empire...with a Parliament having powers to make laws for the peace order and good government of Ireland and an Executive responsible to that Parliament, and shall be styled and known as the Irish Free State.”⁵ However, the Treaty was ratified by only a small margin on 7 January 1922, which indicates the split inside the Sinn Féin over the acceptance of its condition and is evidence of further civil unrest to come. The creation of the Irish Free State (1922-1937), while undoubtedly a result achieved through long and painful struggles, did not put an end to ongoing violence, or, as Yeats darkly prophesied, “blood & misery” at home (*CL*, to Olivia Shakespear, 22 Dec 1921). During the Anglo-Irish War, there was hardly a unified voice representing the will of the Irish people—deliberate use of violence by a minority to block possibilities of a compromise settlement and the ruthless action against the “informers” and “collaborators” had buried seeds of antagonism. Moreover, the Anglo-Irish Treaty allowed for the separation of Northern Ireland, created by the Government of Ireland Act in 1920, which opted out of the Free State one day after the signing of the Treaty. The partition of Ireland turned the pro-republican members in the IRA anti-Treaty, who not long after engaged in open military conflicts with the pro-Treaty provisional government and were later known as the “Irregulars.” The Irish Civil War, which lasted from June 1922 to a ceasefire in May 1923, created even more challenges for the newly established Free State struggling toward national unity.

Yeats’s commitment to the Irish Free State and his determination to influence the

⁵ Excerpted from the *Articles of Agreement for a Treaty between Great Britain and Ireland*, taken from the transcript in *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy Volume I, 1919-1922*. Accessed from The National Archive of Ireland, <http://www.nationalarchives.ie/index.html>.

younger generation are clearly evidenced by the active public life he chose to play in the 1920s. The feeling in 1916 that he should return to Ireland to “begin building” was finally realized. In 1922, he accepted senate nomination, which he served for two consecutive terms, until 1928. He was one of the three senators who were qualified to advise on topics of education, literature, and arts, and he made good use of his position to exert influence on the way Irish culture was to be shaped and to find government support for the Abbey Theater. Cullingford argues that the disruptions and violence brought by the Civil War stimulated Yeats’s longing for order and turned him “in the opposite direction [of the Republican cause]” (*Yeats, Ireland, and Fascism* 113), which partly explains why he willingly accepted the Senate nomination. In late 1922, Yeats finally moved back to Dublin and took lodgings at 82 Merrion Square, “the grandest of the Georgian squares” (Foster 210). Yeats wrote of the decision with satisfaction to Lady Gregory: “[Merrion Square] puts back my family into some kind of dignity & gives my children a stately home & myself a background for old age” (*CL*, 23 Feb 1922). Clearly, he was starting to be more concerned with being established and with the approaching of old age. Moving back to Dublin also signaled his willingness to return to the political and cultural center that had once driven him away and left him disappointed. Even with the worsening situation of the Civil War and the threat it brought, Yeats managed to hold his ground.

In the spring of 1922, also, the renovation work at Ballylee Castle was finally complete. It would be Yeats’s summer residence from then on until 1928, and would provide him the quietness and peace he needed in order to write. He renamed it “Thoor Ballylee” and explained to Shakespear, “Thoor is Irish for Tower & it will keep people from suspecting us of modern gothic & a deer park. I think the harsh sounding ‘Thoor’ amends the softness of the rest” (*CL*, 23 April 1922). Nicholas Grene believes that the act of renaming further confirms Yeats’s possession of this place, with a name “exotically unrecognizable as either Irish ‘túr’ or English ‘tower,’” and that Yeats would from then on be “poetically at home in

the tower” (94). Yeats spent the summer of 1922 at Thoor Ballylee, writing his verse and working on his memoir. At the same time, the threat of Civil War came near, as members of de Valera’s “Irregular” forces were disrupting communications around Gort, including traffic, newspapers, and mail. In his correspondences, Yeats wrote of living in “a blockaded district” (*CL*, to J. C. Squire, 16 July 1922) and of the area’s isolation: “We have been cut off from the rest of the world by civil war. No newspapers, no trains, no telegrams, no letters...” (*CL*, to Ezra Pound, 27 July 1922). In late August, the guerrilla wars that mainly took the form of ambushes, explosions, and arson went as near as to Yeats’s tower, and the bridge connecting the tower to the road was blown up on 19 August. In response to the civil disturbances, the Free State Government, not unlike the British Government before it, chose to engage in reprisal policies and quick executions. In January 1923 alone, a total of thirty-four Republican prisoners were executed. The Republican forces retaliated by setting fire to the houses of several prominent citizens and issuing an order that the houses of senators should be attacked (Brown 288). As Hopkinson puts it, it is “vendetta on a national scale” (140).

As one of the newly appointed senators, Yeats was among the possible targets of abduction and murder in late 1922 and early 1923. The houses of Horace Plunkett and Richard Bagwell, his fellow senators, were burned, and they were threatened with kidnap and murder. Plunkett, whom Yeats had known for many years, retired from the senate in late 1923 and left Ireland for two years out of safety concern. Foster points out that by the end of February 1923, thirty-seven senators’ houses had been set fire to; 82 Merrion Square was fired upon just before Christmas in 1922, and armed guards were posted (230). Both Foster and Brown have suggested that Yeats might also have considered a “general removal” from Dublin (Foster 232) and even quitting the senate post (Brown 288-289). Brown contends that it was actually George who succeeded in reminding her husband of the “responsibilities greater than the personal or the familial” (289) and who persuaded him that a “general removal might be a bitter mistake” (cited in Foster 232). Yeats’s apprehension is

understandable, but George's instinct proved to be correct. By the end of May 1923, the "Irregular" forces had announced a ceasefire, thus ending the Civil War, although the wounds had cut deep.

The agitation at home stimulated much of Yeats's verse during this period. Two long poem sequences, "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" and "Meditations in Time of Civil War," were written among the disturbances, and deal explicitly with the wars. They would become his most thorough and scathing meditations on the violence that was at the heart of the divisive tumults. Aside from verse writing, Yeats continued to write his memoir. *The Trembling of the Veil*, which would later become the second part of *Autobiographies*, also reflects his attitude towards Ireland during the early 1920s. Uncertainties over the Anglo-Irish War and the threat of civil war are felt through the lines. At the beginning of Book II, "Ireland After Parnell," he was reminded of his conviction thirty years ago that after Parnell's death in 1891, Ireland "was to be like soft wax" for him and his generation to mould into a new shape (*Au* 169), a conviction also expressed, around 1891, in his introduction to *Representative Irish Tales*: "Meanwhile a true literary consciousness—national to the centre—seems gradually forming out of all this disguising and prettifying, this penumbra of half-culture" (*P&I* 36-37). Thirty years later, as another "storm of politics" (37) was hitting Ireland, Yeats apparently felt the need, almost the responsibility, now that he was an established poet and a senator, to take part in forging the new Irish nation. He felt that the writing of his memoir was not just the historicizing of his personal history or his friends' stories, but also a way to "encourage the young to begin building in Ireland, when the struggle is over" (Foster 187).

Adding to an already substantial reputation, the Nobel Prize in literature was awarded to him in November 1923. Accepting the prize and going to Stockholm to receive it, Yeats apparently realized the weight it would add to his influence on cultural and artistic matters in Ireland, as senator and the national poet. In response to T. Sturge Moore's inquiry on whether he would accept the prize, and in various other replies he made to letters of congratulations,

Yeats made it clear that he considered the prize as part of Europe's welcome to the Irish Free State: "[the prize] will be a great help to me in several ways.... I will find it easier to get the Government to listen to me on artistic things. I look upon it as a recognition of the Free State, and of Irish literature" (Bridge 51). It is interesting, though, that when Yeats spoke of himself as one of the representatives of Irish literature, he had in mind his involvement in the Abbey Theater, which he considered to have inaugurated the Irish dramatic movement, rather than his achievement in verse writing. In the lecture he gave at the Royal Academy of Sweden, titled "The Irish Dramatic Movement," Yeats recounted the works of his "fellow-workers" in the Abbey, chiefly Lady Gregory and John Synge, whom he credited as deserving to receive the prize with him: "I felt that a young man's ghost should have stood upon one side of me and at the other a living woman sinking into the infirmity of age" (Au 418). In the opening of this speech, Yeats deliberately directed his audience's attention to the Irish dramatic movement, suggesting that he would not have been eligible for the prize if he "had written no plays, no dramatic criticism, if [his] lyric poetry had not a quality of speech practiced upon the stage, perhaps even...if it were not in some degree the symbol of a movement" (Au 410). This is more than a gesture of playing humble. In fact, put in the context of the Ireland in 1923, Yeats's emphasis of the Abbey Theater and its endeavor was partly a strategy to get government funding for it as the national theater (which was realized in 1925). Moreover, by positioning himself among the generation of artists in Ireland involved in the movement for "the creation of a literature to express national character and feeling" (Au 394), and by subjecting his poetry to that particular movement, he further strengthened his affiliation with the founding spirit of his nation. It was in fact a move to reinforce his rightful place in cultural and artistic matters in Ireland.

I would also like to add that at the center of Yeats's work in the 1920s, both senatorial and cultural, is the key concept of "unity of being," which he had proposed in an earlier essay "If I Were Four-and-Twenty," first published in *The Irish Statesman* in 1919. Yeats's first

recording of the term appeared in an automatic script in September 1918 (*LE* 383), but it is in “If I Were Four-and-Twenty” that he elaborates on this concept. The essay, written during the uncertainties of the Anglo-Irish War, displays Yeats’s newly found sense of cultivation. In the opening section, Yeats proclaims: “I had three interests: interest in a form of literature, in a form of philosophy, and a belief in nationality.... Now all three are, I think, one, or rather all three are a discrete expression of a single conviction” (*LE* 34). By the time he wrote the essay, he considered himself having “become a cultivated man” (34), ready to set out and imagine the way for Ireland to achieve the “unity of being” (46). He believes that the case with the nation was analogous to the individual: “It is just the same with a nation—it is only a cultivated nation when it has related its main interests one to another” (35). In the body of the essay, he observes the *lack* of national culture, unity, and character, and posits his newly found sense of personal integration and family strength as a counter force against national disintegration (Archibald 111). The concluding section of this essay, although apparently ironic, reveals his determination to help forge the desired unity: “if I were not four-and-fifty, with no settled habit but the writing of verse, rheumatic, indolent, discouraged, and about to move to the Far East, I would begin another epoch by recommending to the Nation a new doctrine, that of unity of being” (*LE* 46). In fact, three years later, by his acceptance of the senate seat, Yeats was indeed ready to “begin another epoch” by engaging actively in Free State affairs. In 1924, after years of struggle and civil strife, in the Free State where he sensed that “Dublin is reviving after the Civil War.... People are trying to found a new society” (*CL*, to Edmund Dulac, 28 January 1924), he was ever more well-established to realize his ideas about national unity. In a Senate session, he voiced his belief that Ireland would be united one day (although that one day is yet to come); he believed that it can be done “if we govern this country well. We can do that, if I may be permitted as an artist and a writer to say so, by creating a system of culture which will represent the whole of this country, and which will draw the imagination of the young towards it” (*SS* 87). The idea of “unity of being” was

understandably intriguing to Yeats in the context of the early 1920s, when the new nation was undergoing the painful process of coming into existence, for Yeats aligned himself with the process of creating a new state, to which the process of writing, for him, is deeply analogous. This idea is further strengthened by the assiduous efforts he and his wife devoted to constructing the *Vision* system to explain the cycles of history. In 1926, the first edition of *A Vision* (though dated 1925) was published, and in the opening “Dedication” Yeats writes: “I wished for a system of thought that would leave my imagination free to create as it chose and yet make all that it created, or could create, part of the one history, and that the soul’s” (*VA* xi). The statement sums up the project which had occupied him since his marriage through the most part of the 1920s. *A Vision* represents Yeats’s desire to name, classify, and order experience and his attempt to elaborate a philosophy of history. Living in his tower, Thoor Ballylee, embodies the same impulse (Archibald 110). As the next chapter will show, his tower would be the site from which his poetic voice gains its power and be rewritten into his poems of the 1920s, gaining a second dimension of significance.

However, the role of the artist and writer somehow complicated his involvement in politics, which eventually leads to a palpable bitterness and intensified sense of minority identity towards the latter half of the 1920s. Although Yeats’s chief concern rested on art and education, he had found it necessary to “mark out a battleground where he could fight about politics, religion, and free speech” (Foster 273). The Free State Government’s growing conservatism, partly to appeal to the nation’s Catholic majority, was reflected in measures such as censorship of film and literature and the banning of divorce, against which Yeats vociferously protested.⁶ In Dublin, he found himself once again caught up in disputes and had to battle different parties. He was distrusted by hard-line Republicans and often

⁶ Yeats had spoken against the amendment to the *Censorship of Films Bill* (1923) in the Senate on 7 June 1923 (SS 51); his much quoted speech in the debate on divorce was delivered on 11 June 1925 (SS 89-102), and he had published the notes for an earlier version in *The Irish Statesman* on 4 March 1925. As for his attack on the *Censorship of Publication Bill* (1928), he had retired from the Senate a few days before the debate on the bill, but had published an article in *The Spectator* on 29 September 1928, stating his opposition (SS 175-180).

denounced by the Catholic clerics as heretic. Foster argues that the struggles and quarrels Yeats faced in the 1920s “showed up a fundamental contradiction in his evolving thought” (273). On the one hand, his opposition to the government’s inclination toward conservatism reflects his lasting defense for artistic and intellectual freedom—“Literature must take the responsibility of its power, and keep all its freedom” (*Ex* 117); however, he had also begun to espouse an “authoritarian, coherent rule of life as mediated through politics, invoking an inherited aura of tradition” (Foster 273). Cullingford puts the contradiction as the problem of “the reconciliation of the need for order with the desire for liberty” (*Yeats, Ireland, and Fascism* 165), citing examples of both aspects to show that Yeats was an assiduous defender of liberty and individual freedom, despite his desire for order. The contradiction is especially relevant in the context of the middle and late 1920s; after all, after so much violence and turbulence in Ireland, the restoration of order was a prerequisite for forging a new national consciousness and culture and the desired unity of being. Another sympathetic reading of Yeats’s desire for order, which when taken to the extreme is sometimes identified as authoritarian, appears in Archibald’s *Yeats*, in which he argues that Yeats’s leaning toward authoritarianism was part of the imposition of the modernist aesthetics on politics, since “some of the central assumptions of modernism, when translated into political terms, do have an authoritarian thrust” (163). Despite these more sympathetic readings, it is undeniable that Yeats also self-consciously occupied a place which he considered superior and entitled to speak for the betterment of his people, who did not necessarily identify with him and the minority group he represented. It was during this period that his partial embrace of his own Anglo-Irish heritage strengthened, which was shown in his intensified recognition with figures such as Burke, Swift, Goldsmith, and Berkeley, whom he saw as representing “the flowering of an Ascendancy culture which resisted the modernizing, mechanistic, democratic ideals of the enlightenment” (Howes 102). The positioning inevitably put him in an embattled position in the Free State, which once again left him much embittered towards the end. When

The Tower, which could be seen as a record of Yeats's manifold meditations during the 1920s, was published in 1928, he was astonished by its bitterness. Writing from Rapallo, Italy, he expressed the longing to put off "the bitterness of Irish quarrels" and write his "most amiable verses" (CL, to Lady Gregory, 24 Feb 1928). 1928 was also the year he resigned from the senate seat.

A lot can be said about Yeats's politics in the 1920s and the 1930s, and certainly a lot has been said, some sympathetic, others hostile. I do not wish to complicate matters here by reproducing the debates on the often controversial topic of Yeats's politics.⁷ I have spent the most part of this chapter on sketching the context that prompted most of the *Tower* poems and the complications involved because I believe that to read these poems in the context of the times in which Yeats lived and wrote not only brings a more informed reading, but in a way also does the poetry justice. The poetry of this period is not bound to the evolution of the Irish Free State, but recreates and refashions the troubled formations of the state within the parallel process of the creation of poetry. This is one way in which poetry becomes a symbol of its own time, in the sense that Yeats so often meditated on. I would also like to emphasize that during the 1920s Yeats displayed some of his most characteristic ambivalences towards the concept of identity, artistic value, and artistic responsibility, which are inextricably linked to his projections and imaginings of the new nation he then lived in and served. They were also deeply implicated in conflicts, self-doubt, and contradiction. *The Tower*, as an artistic product and achievement that bears witness to the process of Yeats's taking up of the challenges and crises of the turbulent 1920s, deserves to be understood as a journey which Yeats initiated and which, at its end, brought him a detached stance from which he could meditate on that recent past.

⁷ Marjorie Howes summarizes the debates concerning Yeats's politics, particularly those related to Yeats's nationalism and nationality, which started with O'Brien's essay "Passion and Cunning" and goes all the way to the more recent postcolonial readings (inaugurated by Edward Said) and the critique of Yeats's nationalism by Seamus Deane and Richard Kearney. See Howes 5.

Chapter Two

Thoor Ballylee as Symbol of Art and Place of Writing

Chapter one outlines the context of Yeats's decision to move back to Ireland's cultural and political center and begin "building again." At the crossroad moment of both national history and personal history, he needed to re-examine his role in the newly emerging nation that was coming into existence in much turmoil. Such need found answer in his continued occult explorations, which was later systemized into *A Vision*, and in a new sense of place and foundedness, which, as I will argue, came in large part from establishing an outpost of poetic reality in his tower, Thoor Ballylee. In fact, his tower, with its "winding stair," also supplies the inspiration for his *Vision* system. It stands at the center of his artistic career during the 1920s, as it is symbolically remade for his imagination. It is transformed from a place of dwelling to his place of writing, where the poet lives "within his own mind" (Heaney, *Place of Writing* 24), made possible both by the associations of the tower symbol and by the materiality of the actual tower. And it is in *The Tower*, the collection that takes its title from this very Yeatsian symbol, that we can best see its enabling power and how it fortifies the poetic voice. This chapter analyzes how Thoor Ballylee becomes the Yeatsian tower symbol and the place of writing for the ageing poet, retaining its material reality and sternness while providing the symbolic associations he needed. The latter part of the chapter examines the titular poem, "The Tower," in terms of how the symbol functions to shed light on the relationship between place and writing in the creative process.

Yeats's readers hardly need his bold and affirmative pronouncement in "Blood and the Moon"—"I declare this tower is my symbol" (*VP* 480)—to realize the symbolic significance of his tower. The tower is his symbol of art, and has supplied much of the inspiration for his poetic enterprise, especially during the 1920s. While the significance of the tower as a poetic symbol has been acknowledged, it remains to be examined exactly what the tower is symbol

of and how such process of symbolization can be understood in relation to the *Tower* poems. Rob Doggett sees the tower as a “hybrid image” derived from British literary culture and Irish local culture (85). I would further suggest that the two most relevant ways to understand Yeats’s tower symbol are from its symbolic associations and its topographic significance.

The Tower Symbol

The tower symbol has a long history behind its various associations. Given its prevalence in literary, artistic, religious, architectural and other texts, a comprehensive account of its history and background would require another separate study and is outside the scope of this thesis. However, to better comprehend Yeats’s use and construction of his tower symbol, I believe it is necessary to have a basic understanding of its associations in relation to his knowledge of it. In the following analysis, I examine the tower symbol in some of its literary and occult connotations. I want to emphasize that while Yeats certainly adopts meanings from hybrid traditions, his own construction of the symbol is not dictated by them; rather, his knowledge of the associations provides the basis on which he can re-invent it for his own.

A. British Literary Tradition

In one of its earliest forms, the tower is closely connected with astronomy and theology because of its proximity to the sky and thus to the divine and divine knowledge, as height is also associated with spirituality. The Tower of Babel is perhaps one of the most long-standing and well-known tower symbols that represent men’s desire to approach divine wisdom. Also, because of its enclosed nature, the tower has also been associated with philosophical retreat, its source reaching back to early Christian iconography (Murawska 143). In eighteenth and nineteenth century art and literature, the tower is popularly regarded as a symbol of thoughtful isolation or forced imprisonment, the latter of which most commonly seen in

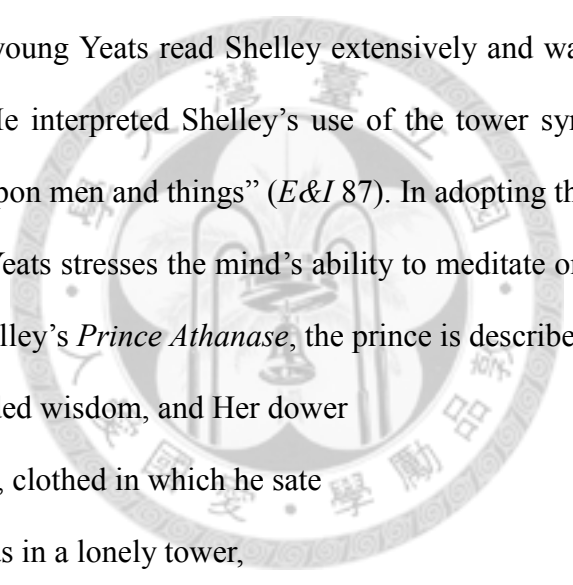
nineteen-century Gothic novels, where a high and isolated tower often implies imprisonment. As to the association of thoughtful isolation, Katarzyna Murawska identifies Milton's *Penseroso* as the first prominent literary image of the tower "built for solitary meditation, and occupied by a philosopher in search of ultimate knowledge" (146). The lines from *Penseroso* are:

Or let my lamp, at midnight hour,
Be seen in some high lonely tower,
Where I may oft outwatch the Bear,
With thrice great Hermes, or unsphere
The spirit of Plato to unfold
What worlds or what vast regions hold
The immortal mind that hath forsook
Her mansion in this fleshly nook

The laborious search for ultimate knowledge is signified by the lamp that shines at midnight hour, in a "high lonely tower" secluded and isolated from the common world, the lamp being the sign of a vigilant mind. The figure of *Penseroso* makes clear his relationship to "the Platonic tradition as well as to Neoplatonism: the idea of the soul liberated from matter and raised to a higher level of cognition" (Murawska 148). This image was later portrayed in one of Samuel Palmer's Milton cycle, "The Lonely Tower," which shows a silhouetted tower against a midnight landscape, with a lamp-lit top, detached from the world below. Palmer's illustration also highlights the distance between the tower, situated on the mountaintop and belonging to the part of the sky, and the common world, represented by the shepherds and farmers at the lower part of the painting, who look upwards to the tower and its seemingly unreachable distant light. By the turn of the nineteenth century, the secluded nature of the tower was a popular association. When Shelley makes the tower symbol a repeated motif in his works, he not only continued the literary image created by Milton—philosopher in a

lonely tower searching for wisdom—but also added an escapist element to it, often stressing self-willed exile and rejection of the world. Murawska also points out that Shelley, in inheriting the lamp motif from Milton, “furnishes his tower with a different, less ambiguous symbol of the tower-dweller’s intellectual interests, namely books” (153).

The implication of the tower-dweller’s intellectual interests would also be present in Yeats’s making of his tower symbol. Yeats had written of Shelley’s tower symbol in a 1900 essay titled “The Philosophy of Shelley’s Poetry,” in which he observes that “[t]he tower, important in Maeterlinck, as in Shelley, is, like the sea, and rivers, and caves with fountains, a very ancient symbol, and would perhaps, as years went by, have grown more important in his poetry” (*E&I* 87). The young Yeats read Shelley extensively and was very much influenced by the romantic poet. He interpreted Shelley’s use of the tower symbol as suggesting “the mind looking outward upon men and things” (*E&I* 87). In adopting the tower symbol with the Shelleyian suggestion, Yeats stresses the mind’s ability to meditate on the outward world in a detached manner. In Shelley’s *Prince Athanase*, the prince is described as:



His soul had wedded wisdom, and Her dower
Is love and justice, clothed in which he sate
Apart from men, as in a lonely tower,
Pitying the tumult of their dark estate

Yeats again acknowledges Shelley’s influence on him and the prevalence of this literary symbol in a later note to the 1933 *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*: “In this book and elsewhere, I have used towers, and one tower in particular, as symbols and have compared their winding stairs to the philosophical gyres, but it is hardly necessary to interpret what comes from the main track of thought and expression. Shelley uses towers constantly as symbols” (*VP* 831).

In a 1918 poem, “The Phases of the Moon,” Yeats makes explicit the literary predecessors he has in mind by having his fictional character, Michael Robartes, observe

Yeats himself in the tower:

We are on the bridge; that shadow is the tower,
And the light proves that he is reading still.
He has found, after the manner of his kind,
Mere images; chosen this place to live in
Because, it may be, of the candle-light
From the far tower where Milton's Platonist
Sate late, or Shelley's visionary prince:
The lonely light that Samuel Palmer engraved,
An image of mysterious wisdom won by toil;
And now he seeks in book or manuscript
What he shall never find. (*VP* 372-373)

Here the tower and its candle light are identified with the image of "mysterious wisdom won by toil," suggested by the three literary and artistic predecessors: Milton's *Il Penseroso*, Shelley's *Prince Athanase*, and Samuel Palmer's "The Lonely Tower." These direct attributions hint at the deliberate detached attitude of the tower dweller and his willful choice of the place in hope of obtaining "mysterious wisdom." Aware that his readers would also be familiar with these literary images, Yeats works to undermine the validity of such image by having Robartes first observe that Yeats "seeks in book or manuscript / What he shall never find" and then explain the phases of the moon to Owen Aherne while Yeats, in the tower, remains ignorant. The underlying suggestion is that the "mysterious wisdom" is never to be found in books (suggestive of the tower dweller's intellectual interests) and through midnight "toil." This idea also corresponds to Yeats's belief that "truth cannot be discovered but may be revealed, and that if a man do not lose faith, and if he goes through certain preparations, revelation will find him at the fitting moment" (*VA* x). Murawska argues that Yeats "perceived the shallow nature of the tower image with its solitary light, which since Milton's

first use of it had been too often repeated, and thus faded and withered, and become the equivalent of a theatrical prop, an empty ornamentation which hides a void” (162). Moreover, since the associations are distinctly British, it is arguable that Yeats avoided following that tradition directly. While the tower symbol already existing in British literary tradition has supplied associations relevant to Yeats’s philosophical interests, he had refused to take for granted these associations for his own tower symbol. Of course, he would also have been familiar with the negative connotations of the ivory tower that had become popular since the nineteenth century, which was derived from the tower’s enclosed and detached characteristic. To construct his own symbol, Yeats would need associations from other sources and on a more personal level.

B. The Tower in the Tarot Trump

Another less universal, more esoteric (but perhaps equally important) aspect of the tower symbol comes from the associations derived from the Tarot trump, “The Tower,” and its associated meanings in the doctrines of the Golden Dawn. Given Yeats’s interest in the occult and his involvement in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn during the 1890s, it should be worthwhile to bear in mind his knowledge of the Tarot pack, which was associated by Golden Dawn members with the Kabbalistic Tree of Life and were used for rituals and divination. In the Tarot, “The Tower” is the sixteenth card in the Major Arcana. In Yeats’s Italian pack, the card shows a tower hit by lightning, its top struck open. In the Rider-Waite deck, which were drawn by Pamela Coleman Smith following the directions of A. E. Waite, both of whom were former Golden Dawn members, the card shows a tall tower on a high cliff, and its burning roof, which is also a crown, is struck off by a zigzag of lightning; two figures are falling out of the tower, their arms spreading wide, and bits of fire can be seen on the top of the tower and its windows. This image corresponds to the Golden Dawn interpretation of the card: “The Tower” represents the Tower of Babel struck by the Fire from Heaven. Yeats,

as an Adept in the Golden Dawn, could not have failed to grasp this particular aspect of the symbol.

Kathleen Raine was among the first Yeatsian scholars to have established detailed connections of the Tarot symbols as they appear in Yeats's work. In the chapter titled "Yeats, the Tarot and the Golden Dawn" in her book *Yeats the Initiate*, Raine traces the history of the Tarot, the central doctrines of Golden Dawn, and Yeats's understanding of both, to make sense of his use of Tarot symbols in his work. Raine identifies major Tarot symbols, such as The Fool, The Magician, The Star, The Hermit, and The Tower, among others, as they appear in Yeats's Red Hanrahan stories and certain poems, where their symbolic meanings add to the interpretative possibilities of the text. Raine's reading is framed in the context of Golden Dawn doctrines, by which the symbol of the tower represents a higher power descending down the Tree of Life, that is, from the divine to the human. However, since the Golden Dawn teachings decree that ultimate truth is to be obtained by toiling *upward* the Kabbalistic Tree of Life, divine inspiration coming *downward* is both unusual and unasked-for. Combined with the Golden Dawn interpretation of the Tower as the Tower of Babel struck by the fire from Heaven, the tower itself can be understood, as Raine argues, as "the edifice of human knowledge," and the lightning as "the descent of inspiration" (245). However, Raine seems to have taken the Tower Trump as symbolizing wisdom, while in fact the card does not symbolize wisdom. While her reading points out the intellectual implication of the card, it does not address the suggestion of imminent change and the possibility of ill omen that are also inherent in the Tower trump.

Edward Larrissy elaborates on Raine's reading of the Tower and proposes a more informed interpretation of the connection between Yeats's tower and the Tarot symbol. Firstly, if the symbol of the tower represents divine power or inspiration descending down the Tree of Life, as opposed to the "normal" (or usual) upward path, it could also be interpreted as "God inverted," which is also Yeats's secret Golden Dawn name, *Demon est Deus Inversus* (DEDI).

Thus, Larrissy argues that in a sense “the Tower had always been Yeats’s emblem” (165). Moreover, as far as the tower symbol is interpreted in relation to Tarot readings, Larrissy proposes a valuable observation, which I think deserve quoting in length:

There is another point to bear in mind about the Tarot: each card may be regarded from two closely related aspects, a favourable and an unfavourable. From a favourable point of view the Tower suggests the descent of a dangerous but renovating inspiration, for both individual and society, one that is both ‘Destroyer and Preserver,’ in Shelley’s phrase. But unfavourably aspected it suggests destruction merely, God’s wrath at the Tower of Babel. From either point of view, this tower is one from which to *contemplate the advent of a social crisis*. The Golden Dawn initiates, their minds stocked with Kabbalah, would have thought that the card referred to Babel. There the point at issue between God and the descendants of Noah was not only the hubris of building to the skies, but the related facts that enabled them to do this: settling in one place and giving themselves “a name” in their “one language” (Genesis 11:1-9). The Tower signifies for Yeats *a naming and a settling*. (166, emphasis mine)

Larrissy’s reading makes two closely related points about the tower symbol and its relevancy to Yeats’s tower and his later poetry. First, the “naming” and “settling” are both crucial in terms of Yeats’s imagining of his relation to Ireland: the “naming” corresponds to his renaming of his tower, and the “settling” to his desire to settle down and be “rooted” in the land. Then, “the advent of a social crisis” entails change brought by an outward force and ensuing uncertainties. In other words, while the nature of the outward force may remain ambivalent, the tower symbol clearly suggests a moment of change and instability. Lloyd, commenting on Yeats’s later poetry, also notes that “in the Tarot the tower is the card not of permanence but of imminent change” (75). As poems in *The Tower* testify, such an emblem is a most fitting one to bear witness to a turbulent time, a time of crisis and upheaval, when even the ruin and destruction of the tower is explicitly prophesied.

In *Esoteric Symbols: The Tarot in Yeats, Eliot, and Kafka*, June Leavitt adds another point about Yeats's tower symbol in relation to the Tower trump. In addition to identifying the tower as "represent[ing] an apocalyptic crisis which will bring forth a higher consciousness," she points out that in Yeats's later poetry the tower is also "a symbol of mystical ascension," which is "meant to convey the spirit of strength to the poet" (138). If we recall the context of the 1920s outlined in chapter one, when Yeats had to take up challenges posed by his role and chosen identification, "the spirit of strength" becomes a particularly appropriate and desirable characteristic of the poet's sign. And indeed, in "The Tower," the nature of the tower as a fortress is clearly implied.

Having sketched out some of the associations that can be derived from Yeats's occult knowledge, I must pause and stress that the purpose of bringing up the Tarot reading of the Tower trump is not to dictate a particular kind of interpretation of the symbol. The "esoteric" side of the tower is taken up here because it provides a new perspective in understanding Yeats's construction of his tower symbol. After all, it cannot be denied that the occult and esoteric side often has equal importance for Yeats as his literary traditions. As for the Tarot reading of the Tower trump, undoubtedly there is more than one way to interpret the card, just as there are numerous associations inherent in the "ancient" tower symbol. The critical surveys cited above represent some of the most relevant ways to investigate Yeats's tower symbol in the occult tradition. By its suggestion of a time of change and crisis, the tower symbol provides meanings on a more personal level.

Metaphoric Topography of the Actual Tower, Thoor Ballylee

So far, I have investigated some key associations that are most relevant to Yeats's tower symbol. While these associations are derived from hybrid traditions, I suggest that Yeats's tower symbol is an invented one rather than simply an adopted one. In Yeats's later poetry, the symbol is distinctly Yeatsian, complicated by the poet's imaginative impositions and

created anew. This is made possible by its having a direct referent in the real tower, Thoor Ballylee. As Daniel A. Harris argues, the tower symbol could not be fully understood without taking its real referent, Thoor Ballylee, into consideration:

No compilation of the visual and literary sources which filtered through [Yeats's] imagination as he made his greatest poetry—the 'topless towers of Ilium,' the towers of Maeterlinck, Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, and the Tarot pack—can explain the wholeness of Thoor Ballylee. This is because the tower is not an adopted symbol but an ancient image built anew in Yeats's mind; the allusions, the history contained within it belong in the most intimate way to Yeats himself. What is most radical about the tower is how far Yeats managed, poetically, to transmute the *prima materia* of its stone into a spiritual presence without denying the physical solidity of his place (94, original emphasis)

For Yeats, the significance of the tower extends well beyond the symbolic level. While the tower in the poetry does not always refer to his tower, poems in *The Tower* that make use of the tower image do point to this particular tower, the only real estate Yeats had ever owned. As he wrote before actually moving into the tower, he was “making a setting for [his] old age, a place to influence lawless youth with its severity & antiquity” (*CL*, to John Quinn, 23 July 1918). Another letter makes it more explicit: “I am making this gaunt tower the centre of many poems. It is a deliberately chosen symbol of some difficult truths” (*CL*, to the Marchioness of Londonderry, 23 July 1923). Seminal poems such as “The Tower” and “Meditations in Time of Civil War” were written inside the walls of Thoor Ballylee during the early 1920s and owed their gestation to the place. It is this real-life referent that distinguishes the tower symbol from other more abstract Yeatsian symbols (such as the rose, tree, mask, hawk, among others).

Thoor Ballylee provides for Yeats both artistic and domestic functions. The land on which it stands was rich in historical connections and promised a sense of continuity. Yeats,

who had been drawn to the folk tales in the area, would surely see the land as analogous to authentic Irish spirit. He would have believed, as Declan Kiberd argues, that “places and things needed to be emancipated just as much as people did, to be reanimated with spirit and rescued from mere ownership,” a process that “must begin with the landscape itself” (*Irish Classics* 47). Thus, he would have endeavored to establish a connection with the land, in order to be its spokesperson. Larrissy points out that Yeats’s decision to rename his tower “signifies the poet’s assumption of an ‘*original relation*’ to Ireland, his marriage to ‘rock and hill’” (161-162, emphasis mine). The name Thoor Ballylee, while a compromise and a kind of hybrid, is “quoted” and thus “somehow self-conscious and picturesque” (162).

In order to fully grasp the importance of Thoor Ballylee in becoming Yeats’s tower symbol and the place of writing, we need to first review Yeats’s relation to and his idea about place. As critics have pointed out, places and place names figure prominently in Yeats’s work. In the introduction to *Yeats in Context*, David Holdeman and Ben Levitas point out that Yeats’s writing is “notably cartographic: rich in allusion to landscape, often construing in potent symbolic terms the localities he held to be significant” (4). In Yeats’s early work, the readers often find allusion to or direct naming of specific localities in the Irish West, mostly around his maternal hometown of Sligo. For instance, the first part of his autobiographies, *Reveries over Childhood and Youth*, contains numerous references to memories of Sligo and its people, even though he spent relatively little time of his childhood there. For the young Yeats, the attraction of such places was that he saw them as a direct link to the primitive energy which he believed still alive in the Irish West. The possibility that the place granted, of another world out there, was nourished and developed into a significant aspect of his early evolving thought. As Nicholas Grene observes: “[t]he Sligo locality was so important in his imagination because of its mythological associations, because of its fairy legends, but above all because it contained ‘places of unearthly resort’ on his own home territory” (79). As such, the poet stands in some directly expressive or interpretive relationship to the milieu and has a

grateful or “filial” relation to the place (Heaney, *Place of Writing* 21), receiving inspiration from it and owing his imaginative impulse to it.

As has been mentioned in chapter one, during the 1890s Yeats had believed that the time was ripe for shaping a consciousness that would help unify Ireland and its people, and he took upon himself as his responsibility to forge that unified consciousness. It was during this time that he became interested in the folk tales of the country people, and he collaborated with Lady Gregory to collect them around Galway. This is partly a continuation of his belief in the mythical power inherent in the locality. He saw in the folk tales the unifying energy native to the land, which would be a fit rallying force for the liberation of his nation. By re-creating and re-presenting the mythologies in his work, he believed that he was being their spokesperson. As Jonathan Allison notes, “[t]hrough his own knowledge of Sligo and Gregory’s knowledge of Galway, Yeats feels he is in contact with the ancient folklife of Connacht, rooted in particular locales such as Ben Bulbin, Knocknarea, Ballylee, and perhaps also Coole” (“Galway” 102). However, for an Anglo-Irish Protestant artist like Yeats, whose identity and identification was often troubled, it becomes a pressing issue to justify his right to speak for the land, just as he had to create an “original relation” to the place. Kiberd argues that the act of collecting folktales represents a strategy for the Irish Protestant imagination to identify with the new national sentiment in the revival period. Protestant artists, for whom history “can only be a painful accusation against their own people,” turn to geography “in the attempt at patriotization” (*Inventing Ireland* 107); by emphasizing locality, they were deliberately aligning themselves with the Gaelic bardic tradition of *dinnsheanchas* (knowledge of the lore of places)” (*Inventing Ireland* 107).

Kiberd is quick to point out the underlying strained nature of such act. For Yeats, who had spent considerable time of his childhood in England, it was much easier to reinvent for himself an idealized version of Ireland and romanticized construction of the harmonious coexistence between Protestant landlords and Catholic peasants. After the disappointments of

the early 1910s and the Easter Rising that had shifted public sentiments, his cultural nationalism was no longer a viable means for him to envision the founding of the new nation. The dreamy tone and the mythologizing of the past were replaced by a more solid imagining in the face of tumult and violence, which is reflected in his changed perception of his relation to place. As Richard Ellmann points out, Yeats's relationship with place and locality grew more specific in his old age, and this strong sense of particular place has contributed to the solidity of his mature poetry (*Identity* 146). Places are clearly named and identified, instead of being vaguely referred to. The Irish West retained its charm for him, but in the late 1910s and the 1920s he had taken on a more domineering posture towards his relation with place. He envisioned the ideal metaphor for such relation as being rooted in the land. Hassett points out that "rooting" had important connotations in Yeats's thinking about poetic inspiration, and argues that Yeats "pictured creativity...in terms of the self-delighting soul that...springs from its own principles, 'branching out like a tree from the root'" (143). The idea and merit of rootedness was already made explicit in the 1919 poem "A Prayer for My Daughter," in which the poet, then newly a father, prays for Anne Yeats that "O may she live like some green laurel / Rooted in one dear perpetual place" (*VP* 405). If the young Yeats imagined place as a source of inspiration, spiritual regeneration, and connectedness to his native land, as the much anthologized "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" suggests, such place for him existed in memory, a place from which the poet is absent and which he describes from a place of exile. On the other hand, in his mature poetry, aided and reinforced by the symbol of *his* tower, it was no longer ethereal fairies and spirits that occupied his imagination, but a real and ancient building rising from the land, indeed "deep-rooted" in the earth, a place in which he truly lives and feels connected to. As Grene argues, "What Yeats looked out on from the tower was no longer a magic countryside like the numinous places of the early Sligo poetry or the first Coole poems where the gods walked in the woods, but a historiated vista" (96). Yeats's tower would be the real-life emblem of that rootedness which he had sought to establish. It is "the

physical embodiment of his desire to root himself in historic Irish soil” (Cullingford, “How Many Jacques Molay Got Up The Tower” 777).

Then, why should the tower symbol be considered so important to our better understanding of the poems in *The Tower*? As I have suggested, the fact that *The Tower* takes its title from “the tower” is already proof of its centrality in the book. At this point, it is also worthwhile to mention the cover of *The Tower*, designed by Yeats’s artist friend T. Sturge Moore, which shows an image of Thoor Ballylee, a four-square tower, and its adjoining cottage, embossed in dark green against a gold background, all reflected in flowing water. Yeats’s instruction to Moore about the design makes clear that “the Tower should not be too unlike the real object or rather...it should suggest the real object. I like to think of that building as a permanent symbol of my work plainly visible to the passerby. As you know all my art theories depend upon just this—rooting of mythology in the earth” (CL, to T. Sturge Moore, 21 September 1927). Yeats was satisfied with Moore’s design of the water, writing to tell him that he had “completed the tower symbolism by surrounding it with water” (CL, to T. Sturge Moore, 2 June 1927). He also considered Moore’s cover design “a most rich, grave & beautiful design & admirably like the place” (CL, to T. Sturge Moore, 23 February 1928). The cover design testifies to what Foster believes to be Yeats’s “great architectural and historical symbol realized in a great book” (362).

The Place of Writing

In *The Place of Writing*, Seamus Heaney proposes that “the poetic imagination in its strongest manifestation imposes its vision upon a place rather than accepts a vision from it” (20). In his discussion of the relationship between place and writing in Yeats’s later poetry, Heaney observes that in Yeats’s case, it is this kind of poetic imposition on the place from which he writes that has created “a country of the mind” (21). Thoor Ballylee was his “place of writing,” which “sponsored an attitude and a style” and “attained...a fabulous second

dimension that would eventually transform its original status as a picturesque antiquity in the fields of Ballylee” (22). In order to see how the poet’s imagination imposes on the place and transforms it, the place being simultaneously his declared symbol of art, in the following analysis I examine “The Tower,” written in his tower, which demonstrates how the place becomes the medium through which he meditates on the problem of old age and the crisis of his poetic enterprise.

The titular poem “The Tower” does not open the collection; instead, another poem that seemingly centers on departure and the rejection of the present, mortal world is given the honor to be the opening announcement of *The Tower*. “Sailing to Byzantium,” written in *ottava rima* stanzas, confers onto the reader a feeling of stateliness and, in this case, valediction. An initial impression after reading the poem may be the realization that the speaker is determined to leave the world of “sensual music,” a world of self-repeating regenerative cycles which neglects “monuments of unageing intellect” and which is no place for the “aged man,” who is but “a paltry thing” and “a tattered coat upon a stick” (*VP* 407). “Sailing to Byzantium” also exposes the crisis arising from the decay of body. The crisis is twofold: the first concerns the recognition that the sensual world, while appearing lively and full of life, is in fact locked in a cycle of endless repetition of life and death, from which the speaker longs to leave; the second involves the crisis of his identity, as the speaker finds that “that country” is no longer suitable for him, because it no longer welcomes “unageing intellect,” and prioritizes the body over the soul. In part three of the poem, the speaker reveals that what bothers him in the rejected world is not just, or not exactly, life’s transience and repetitiveness, but the fact that his heart is still “sick with desire,” suggesting that his bitterness comes from his body’s inability to fulfill his heart’s desire. Therefore, he wishes to be purged of that desire and to be liberated from the discrepancy between body and soul. It would appear as if the last part of “Sailing to Byzantium” has resolved the problem; however, we soon realize that this is an illusion. The problem remains unresolved even at the poem’s

closure, implied by the opening of the fourth part, “Once out of nature...,” which suggests a state yet to be fulfilled and a desired future. It is a desire, according to Rob Doggett, “for a new comprehension of time and of self-willed exile” (99). The poem is deliberately dated 1927, a date, among all the dates in *The Tower*, that is closest to the publication of the collection. However, Byzantium is not the destination reached but rather *the beginning*, an impetus put in the first place that anticipates all that follows. In fact, as the opening poem, “Sailing to Byzantium” also announces many of the themes that will run through the rest of the book. As we read on, we will discover a backward movement in time, as tumults and terrors of the wars are relived *after* the seemingly removed and detached poem that is signed “1927.”

The positioning and thematic concerns of “Sailing to Byzantium” add to the force of “The Tower,” which opens, ironically, with the same problem of old age that has troubled the speaker in the previous poem and which seems to have found an imaginative solution in that poem. This creates a sharp contrast between the opening of “the Tower” and the “drowsy” detachment of the golden bird at the end of “Sailing to Byzantium.” In this way, “The Tower” undoes what “Sailing to Byzantium” seems to have closed off, returning to a prior state of emotional agitation. The backward movement is re-stated in the deliberate dating of “The Tower”—at the end of the poem Yeats assigned the year 1926 as its date of composition (when in fact the poem was finished by the autumn of 1925). If “Sailing to Byzantium” presents the prospect of departure, “The Tower” takes the reader back to the poet’s reality—living in his tower and quartered by the encroachment of old age and the discrepancy between bodily infirmity and imaginative intensity. Part one of the poem asks what is befitting of old age, this “absurdity” that has been tied to him as to “a dog’s tail” (*VP* 409). The problem is not so much old age as the consequence of it. Refuting the claim that the imagination dwindles with age, the poet firmly asserts that

Never had I more

Excited, passionate, fantastical
Imagination, nor an ear and eye
That more expected the impossible—
No, not in boyhood when with rod and fly
Or the humbler worm, I climbed Ben Bulbin's back
And had the livelong summer day to spend. (*VP* 409)

He senses that the imagination becomes more powerful with advancing years, a feeling also expressed in the essay "The Bounty of Sweden," in which Yeats describes his reflection as he examined his Nobel Prize medal:

[The medal] shows a young man listening to a Muse, who stands young and beautiful with a great lyre in her hand, and I think as I examine it, 'I was good-looking once like that young man, but my unpractised verse was full of infirmity, my Muse old as it were; and now I am old and rheumatic, and nothing to look at, but my Muse is young. I am even persuaded that she...moves perpetually 'towards the day-spring of her youth'" (*Au* 398).

However, the excitement of the passionate imagination no longer seems compatible with the ageing poet. The only choice for him is to "bid the Muse go back" and "choose Plato and Plotinus for a friend," to "deal / In abstract things" (*VP* 409); in other words, substituting poetic enterprise with philosophical musings. The crisis in "Sailing to Byzantium" is reiterated here as the questioning of the poet's role as an aged artist in the new nation, a world devoid of "singing schools." Should he relinquish the passions excited by the imagination and choose abstract argument instead (it is also worthwhile to remember that "abstract" nearly always has negative connotations for Yeats)? For to carry on the old habit of writing poetry, to clap hands and sing, would only bring derision and humiliation.

With part one ending in this seemingly reluctant acceptance of forsaking imagination, it is surprising to find that in part two, Yeats immediately challenges this acceptance by

resorting to his imagination again, “send[ing] imagination forth” to “call / Images and memories / From ruin or from ancient trees” (*VP* 410). The changed state of mind is simultaneously reflected in his use of Roman numerals to begin each section. Vendler argues that by doing so Yeats meant each numeral to indicate a marked change in “station,” by which she means “physical or mental location” (*Our Secret Discipline* 29), a strategy also powerfully employed in “Sailing to Byzantium,” “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen,” and “Among School Children.” While part one of “The Tower” does not specify the poet’s location, in part two the poet is physically on the top of his tower, and his mental state changes accordingly. Being so quartered by the crisis posed by old age, he finds a counter force as he looks out from the place from which he now writes: “I pace upon the battlements and stare / On the foundations of a house, or where / Tree, like a sooty finger, starts from the earth” (*VP* 410). Up from his tower, where he looks outward to its surroundings, he is able to “look beyond in time and memory backward” and to call forth images that would “renew poetic power” (Adams 152). The act of sending imagination forth is, according to Adams, also to make a defense, significantly, in “a place with a history, now lost, of such defenses” (152). The tower was a fort, and while it no longer serves that purpose literally, it functions as an outward embodiment of the poet’s embattled state. His imaginative impositions on the place allows him to transform an otherwise normal tree in his view into “Tree” (as if it had a proper name), which symbolically represents all that is rooted in the earth and that remains upright. It is this kind of imposition that prompted him to recall personages that are related to the Ballylee area. In his note, Yeats writes that “[t]he persons mentioned are associated by legend, story and tradition with the neighbourhood of Thoor Ballylee or Ballylee Castle” (*VP* 825): a Mrs. French, for whom a faithful servant, taking her words too literally, clipped a farmer’s ears and brought them on plate; Mary Hynes, a local beauty commended in song by the blind poet Raftery, who used to live in the area; a man who had heard of this beauty and vowed to see her but who mistook the moon for the sun and was drowned in the bog of

Cloone. As Doggett points out, these folktales, while comic, “provide an ironic commentary on the costs of worshipping images” (100), a central theme that runs through *The Tower* (Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* 313). Indeed, these folktales are good examples of how an idealized image threatens to take control. The stanza on Mary Hynes does not stress her actual beauty but instead focuses on the poetic construction of such beauty—“a peasant girl commended by a song.” The imagination creates such a powerful image that people

had the greater joy in praising her,
Remembering that, if walked she there,
Farmers jostled at the fair
So great a glory did the song confer (*VP* 410).

The man who was drowned in the bog was “maddened by those rhymes” that he “mistook the brightness of the moon / For the prosaic light of day— / Music had driven their wits astray—” (*VP* 411). These accounts highlight the realization that “poetry itself, beginning with Homer and his depictions of Helen of Troy, is predicated upon the construction of ideal images that others pursue” (Doggett 101). Yeats could not be more familiar with the danger:

the tragedy began
With Homer that was a blind man,
And Helen has all living hearts betrayed.
O may the moon and sunlight seem
One inextricable beam,
For if I triumph I must make men mad. (*VP* 411)

The danger is complicated by the next image that Yeats recalls: his own fictional character Hanrahan, who in Yeats’s *Stories of Red Hanrahan* is a schoolteacher and also a poet. In the original story, Hanrahan pursues the ideal image he himself has created instead of his real lover, Mary Lavalle. This confounding between the ideal image and the real person/lover underlies the complication: Hanrahan the artist becomes both the agent and the victim of his

own creation, which easily presents a parallel case for Yeats, who has also created an ideal image of the beloved, and his “imagination” certainly had “dwel[t] the most / Upon a...woman lost” (*VP* 413). Even the speaker is not immune to such danger. Hanrahan, Yeats’s own character, threatens to take control of its creator. No sooner had Yeats recounted Hanrahan’s story than he himself almost became the victim of his own self-created image. Thus, the speaker, in the middle of recounting the story, was forced to abort the sentence: “Hanrahan rose in frenzy there / And followed up those baying creatures towards— / / O towards I have forgotten what—enough!” (*VP* 412), as if he fears that the image will master him and drive him astray much the same way the image of Mary Hynes drives the country man into the bog. Thus, while the place grants renewal of his poetic power, he must be aware of the danger inherent in such power, the danger of creating images that transfix both the artist and the audience.

On a more general level, it also bespeaks a dilemma for Yeats the artist and national poet, as he reflects on Ireland’s folk past. Successful makings of an idealized image may drive people into blind pursuit, possible consequences of which are painfully meditated on in “Easter, 1916,” or in a much later poem, “Man and the Echo,” in which he openly asks, “Did that play of mine send out / Certain men the English shot?” (*VP* 632). In asking “Does the imagination dwell the most / Upon a woman won or woman lost?” (*VP* 413), Yeats is also asking “is it accomplishment or frustration, the woman won or the woman lost, that most engages the supposedly mature yet still fantastical imagination?” (Bloom 350). Thus, in “The Tower,” the speaker’s abrupt halt is also a “strategic amnesia” employed as the denial for a tragedy that has already occurred, since in the stories Hanrahan had, as he pursued “those baying creatures,” blindly pursued the image instead of the person (Doggett 102). Doggett argues that this introduces “an element of anxiety over the role of the national artist that will emerge in the war poems [“Meditations in Time of Civil War” and “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen”]” (102). As such, “The Tower” both presents the danger on a personal level (being

lost in “the labyrinth of another’s being”) and foreshadows the danger on a broader level, a preoccupation that will run through the next two poems with more intensity.

As he realizes the inevitable danger, Yeats once again turns to his tower. Spurred on by his physical location in the tower, an ancient existence that had witnessed the consequences of such danger, an image that encompasses the past and the present, he withdraws to his place of writing and calls up an image directly linked to the tower but different from earlier ones:

A figure that has grown so fabulous

There’s not a neighbor left to say

When he finished his dog’s day:

An ancient bankrupt master of this house. (*VP* 412)

This master of the house was “so harried” that he was not susceptible to such image-worshipping dangers. Yeats also calls up military images, which are also characteristic of his tower, by imagining that “[r]ough men-at-arms, cross-gartered to the knees / Or shod in iron” (*VP* 412), used to climb the narrow stair he has just climbed to reach the top of the tower. These “men-at-arms” represent another type, suggestive of violence and intrusion, as they “come with loud cry and panting breast / To break upon a sleeper’s rest” (*VP* 412). The breaking is also to break upon the delusion created by the man-made image, and it returns the speaker to his original purpose of calling up images—to “question all”:

Did all old men and women, rich and poor,

Who trod upon these rocks or passed this door,

Whether in public or in secret rage

As I do now against old age? (*VP* 413)

But this question is in fact a reiteration of the “rage” at old age that he felt in part one. What is at stake in part two is the danger and cost of worshipping images, brought to the fore again by Hanrahan’s “mighty memories.” Even the recurrence of memory could result in the poetical triumph that results in tragedy: “And that if memory recur, the sun’s / Under eclipse

and the day blotted out” (*VP* 414). As Douglas Archibald observes, “[t]he wild reverie of Section II has blown away the either/or of Section I. Eye and ear will never be content with argument [...], and the body, with all its frustrated yearning, is unavoidable. However outrageous and destructive its operations, the imagination cannot be dismissed” (141).

As part two of “The Tower” demonstrates, for Yeats, the tower as a place of writing enables imaginative renewal and supplies the spirit of strength against delusion. However, there is another equally important aspect inherent in the concept of “place of writing” that deserves close investigation. At this point, I return once again to Heaney’s observation of Yeats’s “place of writing.” Commenting on the third section of “Meditations in Time of Civil War,” Heaney particularly notes its *ottava rima* form, which also appears in poems in *The Tower* such as “Sailing to Byzantium,” the third section of “Meditations in Time of Civil War,” the first section of “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen,” and “Among School Children.” Heaney argues that “[h]ere [in the poem] the place of writing is essentially *the stanza form itself*, the strong-arched room of eight iambic pentameter rhyming *abababcc* which serves as a redoubt for the resurgent spirit [of the poet]” (29, emphasis mine). Heaney reads “the unshakably affirmative music of this *ottava rima* stanza” as “the formal correlative of the poet’s indomitable spirit” (29). This point was taken up by Vendler, who spends a whole chapter of her book *Our Secret Discipline: Yeats and Lyric Form*, on Yeats’s use of the *ottava rima* in several of his definitive poems. Vendler argues that for Yeats’s poetry, “style was the most important of his qualities” (xiii-xiv), and her study of the various lyric forms which Yeats employed bears this out. The “architecture of a poem,” by which she means not just the exterior properties such as stanza shapes, line lengths, or entire forms such as the sonnet, but also inner structural forms, rhythmic measure, rhyme pattern, stanza form, and genre, is indispensable to a full understanding of Yeats’s work. Poetic form carries equal weight as the message contained. As Vendler’s puts it: “A poem is an experience in time activated by its forms” (5). Therefore, I add to my reading and examination of the place of writing the

investigation of the poem's lyric form, taking it as a mental and imaginative space which also propels Yeats's self-refashioning and the imaginative journey in *The Tower*. The place of writing is simultaneously the physical place of the poet's location and the mental space realized by his technique in the finished work, as form also embodies, conveys, and corresponds to the aforementioned qualities, characteristics, and associations of the tower symbol.

Therefore, the form of part two of "The Tower" should also alert us to its purposeful arrangement, since its octave stanzas consisting of pentameter and tetrameter lines call to mind the *ottava rima* but do not follow its rhyme scheme and metrical patterns. Part two of "The Tower" is an example of what Vendler terms Yeats's "spacious lyric" ((Vendler, *Our Secret Discipline* 291), a form which resembles *ottava rima* but the lacks its pacing and ceremoniousness. The second part of "The Tower" is composed in the form directly adopted from Cowley's, rhyming *aabbcdde* and consisting of a rhyming pentameter couplet, a pentameter rhyming with a tetrameter, and a quatrain in embraced rhyme in which two pentameters enclose two tetrameters. Such "wayward" ((Vendler, *Our Secret Discipline* 317) rhyme scheme and metrical pattern deviate from the more measured and stately *ottava rima* and disrupt our sense of expectation as the stanzas move forward. In part two of "The Tower," the confusion is further strengthened by the disjunction between syntax and rhyme units, occasional syntactical informality, and slant rhymes (Vendler, *Our Secret Discipline* 294). A good example is the following stanza:

Good fellows shuffled cards in an old bawn;
And when that ancient ruffian's turn was on
He so bewitched the cards under his thumb
That all but the one card became
A pack of hounds and not a pack of cards,
And that he changed into a hare.

Hanrahan rose in frenzy there

And followed up those baying creatures towards— (*VP* 411-412)

The slant rhyme of “thumb” and “became,” and “cards” and “towards” adds to the sense of agitation and temporary delusion, which corresponds to the central theme of part two. The end of part two admits that poetical triumph is accompanied by inevitable delusion; here, in the poem’s form, the fact of poetical triumph is self-evident. As Vendler argues, the irregularity acquires the effects of “exertion, of obstacles met and overcome, of intermittent outbreaks of frustration” (*Our Secret Discipline* 317). If we look at part two as a whole, we find that its form carefully imitates the emotional agitation throughout the stanzas. As I have mentioned, the place of writing here is the mental space realized through the poetic form. In part two, the “place” is indeed “written” into the work.

Part three of “The Tower” fulfills the spirit of strength that Yeats’s tower symbol had promised. With the changed mood comes the changed stanzaic form: quick-paced trimeter quatrains rhyming *abab* now replace the “spacious” and slow-paced pentameters and tetrameters as Yeats makes his poetic will and testament:

It is time that I wrote my will;

I choose upstanding men

That climb the streams until

The fountain leap, and at dawn

Drop their cast at the side

Of dripping stone; I declare

They shall inherit my pride (*VP* 414)

Heaney believes that in this part of the poem, “the tower’s stoniness is repeated in the lean, clean-chiselled obelisk of the verse form; its head-clearing airiness is present in the rise and enjambment of the three-stressed line” (30). The tower has become “a pure discharge of energy” (30), embodied in the trimeter quatrains which has become “autobiographical” for

Yeats (Vendler, *Our Secret Discipline* 197). This part significantly announces a series of makings, testaments of allegiance, faith, and also refutes the choice presented in part one. Departing from the danger of reverie and poetic imagining that threaten to take control, part three of “The Tower” initiates a determined attitude firmly established against the threatening forces brought up in the previous two parts. Yeats begins by imagining his heirs. The image is strongly reminiscent of his earlier creation, the fisherman, but whereas the fisherman is “A man who does not exist, / A man who is but a dream” (*VP* 348), the “upstanding men” whom Yeats imagines now is explicitly identified with eighteenth-century Anglo-Ireland, “The people of Burke and of Grattan” (*VP* 414), figures whom he considered iconoclastic in representing the flowering of the Ascendancy culture. As Bloom noted, there is indeed much “Anglo-Irish posturing” in this part (351). For Yeats, eighteenth-century Ireland had “produced individuals, proud and defiant” (Doggett 166), qualities now most appealing to him. In part three of “The Tower,” Yeats’s open allegiance to his Anglo-Irish heritage is closely connected with his tower. Although his tower is a Norman tower, its long history and its being an ancient symbol has rendered a fitting metaphor for him to link the past, present, and future in an unbroken line. Equally important in this concluding part of “The Tower” is the building up of pride in his line (reinforced by the repetition of “pride”) and of faith in the creative power. The determined and proud gesture is represented by the swan, which, facing death,

must fix his eye

Upon a fading gleam,

Float out upon a long

Last reach of glittering stream

And there sing his last song. (*VP* 414)

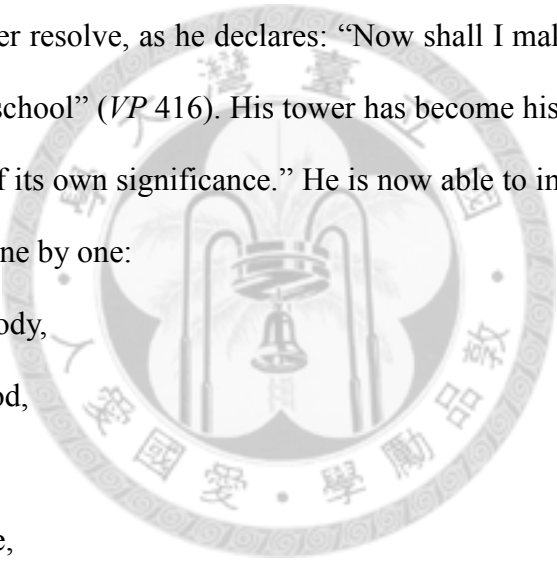
This is the soul that will “clap its hands” and sing despite sure knowledge of the “fading gleam.” Instead of the imagined departure in “Sailing to Byzantium,” now the poet will face

the end and the “coming emptiness” with his Anglo-Irish pride. Having established pride, he finally refutes the choice presented in part one by declaring his “faith”: “And I declare my faith: / I mock Plotinus’ thought / And cry in Plato’s teeth” (VP 414-415), thus refusing philosophical abstractions, even when recognizing the inescapable old age and its attending problems, and choosing to retain his peace by “poet’s imaginings” and “memories of love” (VP 415).

However, part three of “The Tower” is by no means a simple and triumphant resolution of the seemingly irreconcilable problems brought up in the previous parts. Bodily decrepitude as “absurdity” is countered by, not resolved by, acceptance in a gesture of pride, as the swan’s last song and the concluding “bird’s sleepy cry” reiterate inevitable destruction. Moreover, the ability to create by the imagination is implicitly tied with the act of dreaming, as the poet declares that he has prepared his peace by all those things “whereof / Man makes a superhuman / Mirror-resembling dream” (VP 415). The act of dreaming is, in the next seven-line stanza, surprisingly compared to the daws’ building and warming their nest. By such a comparison, Yeats suggests that for man to dream, even if the dream and the self-created image may only result in delusion, is also instinctive; more importantly, he gives “a humble natural analogue to man’s formidable construction of art” (Vendler, *Our Secret Discipline* 198). This second stanza adds another dimension to the poetic voice leaving pride and faith that has been firmly established up to this point, by its “missing” line (a “truncated” stanza, as Vendler terms it, because it only has seven lines while trimeter quatrain is the basic unit used throughout part three), and by its apparent discordant subject matter. Vendler observes that this stanza diverges in much the same way as the third stanza of “Easter, 1916” does: both depart from the imminently relevant historical matters of the rest of the poem and introduce images of nature and natural instinct (*Our Secret Discipline* 198). The daws build and warm their nest by instinct. Such act is neither “learned” nor mechanical; rather, it is an act of natural creation. Thus, by such an analogy, Yeats “bequeaths to his successors not only

the spiritual values of faith and pride, but also the instinctual values of warmth and generative power” (Vendler 199). The tower, where the daws now build in its “loophole,” has also been endowed with such generative quality.

In the last stanza, the poem returns to where it had begun: the inevitable problem of ageing and the death of the poetic voice. The resolution is ambiguous at best. The tower, as his place of writing, has given him a viable metaphor for his embattled state, supplied the images that he needed to test his imagination against, and has, in the third stanza, become embodied in the stanzaic form, with its trimeter quatrain and strong monosyllabic words. Facing the “absurdity” that opens “The Tower” directly, Yeats now turns from outward gesture of bequest to inner resolve, as he declares: “Now shall I make my soul, / Compelling it to study / In a learned school” (*VP* 416). His tower has become his “singing school,” one of the soul’s “monuments of its own significance.” He is now able to imagine what he may need to face, as he lists them one by one:



Till the wreck of body,
Slow decay of blood,
Testy delirium
Or dull decrepitude,
Or what worse evil come—
The death of friends, or death
Of every brilliant eye
That made a catch in the breath—
Seem but the clouds of the sky
When the horizon fades;
Or a bird’s sleepy cry
Among the deepening shades. (*VP* 416)

In this final meditation on all the imaginable disasters that follow the “wreck of body,” the

progression of the mind into the final moments of fading is, as Vendler astutely observes, simultaneously reflected in the rhymes. At first, the rhyme-words, though being slant and not exact, are at least concordant in being either monosyllabic (“soul” with “school”) or disyllabic (“study” with “body”); as “wreck of body” collapses into “dull decrepitude,” the rhyme-words become “visibly discordant not only in syllable-count but also in semantic category,” as in the rhyming of “blood” with “decrepitude” and “delirium” with “come”; however, the concluding lines, as they close off “The Tower,” return to a clear, though fading, consciousness, reflected in the semantically concordant, entirely monosyllabic, and perfectly consonant rhymes of “death” and “breath,” “eye,” “sky,” and “cry,” and “fades” and “shades” (*Our Secret Discipline* 201). As the shades deepen and the horizon fades, so does the poetic vision and voice, finally subsiding into silence, which is implicitly suggested by the missing final line that signifies death that has arrived. If this is a moment of triumph, then the triumph is as ambiguous and half-lit as the landscape itself; if there is a resolution, the resolution is yet to be fulfilled, just as the envisioned golden bird at the end of “Sailing to Byzantium.” Nevertheless, whereas in “Sailing to Byzantium” the problem and crisis of ageing and bodily decay are pretty much evaded, “The Tower” confronts them directly. The final resolution is no longer an artificial bird, but natural birds that are not mechanical, that are part of the natural cycles. This is the most significant values that Yeats’s place of writing has granted. It validates the imagination and the poetic enterprise; it admits the underlying dangers in them; it supplies the spiritual strength as the poet faces the unavoidable isolation and final death. In this titular poem, the physical place of writing and the imaginative place of writing have also become the written place in the work and the mental space of the poem’s lyric form.

However, we must go further, since Yeats did not rest content in erecting a symbol of strength out of his place of writing. Part three of “The Tower” makes clear Yeats’s Anglo-Irish identification. In “The Tower” the identification with his Anglo-Irish heritage is manifested in “pride”; in the next poem, “Meditations in Time of Civil War,” that

identification is shown to be inextricably tied to his imagining of place and of his tower. Heaney argues that as the poet's imagination imposes itself on his place of writing, the "visionary imposition is never exempt from the imagination's antithetical ability to subvert its own creation" (*Place of Writing* 20). "The Tower" imagines Thoor Ballylee as the sign of the poet's indomitable spirit, as the metaphor for his embattled state and isolation, and as the source of his imaginative renewal. In short, it emphasizes the constructive aspects of the tower. However, in "Meditations in Time of Civil War," we will see how the tower also occasions the poet's doubt and questioning, his meditation on inevitable destruction, and his troubled vision in a time of chaos and violence. As historical realities and horror become inescapable, the poet's endeared place of writing also undergoes a necessary process of transformation.



Chapter Three

The Tower as an Imaginative Journey

This chapter investigates how the tower as both symbol of art and place of writing can be understood in terms of the overall thematic concerns of *The Tower*. With this chapter, I want to suggest that while Yeats's mention of his tower only appears in "The Tower" and "Meditations in Time of Civil War," its symbolic associations and its transformed status as the place of writing run through the volume. As the title suggests, *The Tower* is also a book concerned with edification and with creating images and symbols (P 689). Since most poems of *The Tower* were written during Yeats's most publicly-engaged years, the volume can be read not only as a series of the artist's efforts to construct images and symbols, but also as Yeats's deeply-engaged reflections on the founding of his nation. Therefore, I propose to read *The Tower* as charting a journey of repeated disengagement and reengagement with the Irish context, a journey that enables the poet to reconsider his role and identification in the new Free State and to imagine a "unity of being" for his self and the nation. I will be concentrating on the poems that most clearly demonstrate Yeats's engagement (or disengagement) with the historical realities of the 1920s, in order to show how he lives through the crises and doubts of the war poems, turns to more generalized meditations on them, and, after finally constructing the ideal image for the self and the nation, achieves the tranquil and inward-directed contentment befitting the end of a journey.

Thoughts upon the Present State of Ireland:

"Meditations in Time of Civil War" and "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen"

We have seen in "The Tower" how Yeats's Norman tower, as his place of writing, has promised imaginative renewal and stood for his indomitable spirit in the face of encroaching old age. "The Tower" has made firm Yeats's claim to poetry and prepared him with "peace"

when facing the inevitable end. As the agitated mind that finds expression in the “spacious” lyric turns into the proud bequest and acceptance embodied in the quick-pace trimeter lines at the close, it appears that the poet has found a solution for the disappointment and rage that has brought about his wish for departure at the opening of *The Tower*. However, as I hope the following analysis of “Meditations in Time of Civil War” will demonstrate, the poet’s imagination, constantly dwelling on antithesis, in turn works to unsettle this seemingly established foundedness. I begin this chapter with “Meditations in Time of Civil War” because it forcibly demonstrates how meditations on different aspects of Thoor Ballylee and his relation to it have complicated the problems introduced in “Sailing to Byzantium,” which in the war poems is inextricably tied with the historical context of the early 1920s. Together with “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen,” these two long sequences engage closely and intensely with both national and personal crisis, a time of capricious political situation, civil disturbance, and recurrent violence. In the midst of war and uncertainty, the ageing poet is quartered not just by the decline in physical strength and vitality, but also by an urgent questioning of his role in the new nation. At the apogee of his public career—as the publicly recognized national poet, the Irish Free State senator, and the Nobel Prize winner—Yeats’s response to the ongoing violence and struggle is bitingly bitter and bleak. It would seem as if his established “pride” and “faith,” identifiable with his tower and all that it represents, is no longer adequate to counter the “filthy modern tide” now falling upon his nation. However, the volume does not sink into total dejection, significantly because “Meditations in Time of Civil War,” as a commentary on his relationship to his place of writing, affirms the coexistence of foundedness and unfoundedness, of construction and destruction. It is in his readiness to doubt the foundedness that truly shows how his place of writing has indeed strengthened the poetic voice.

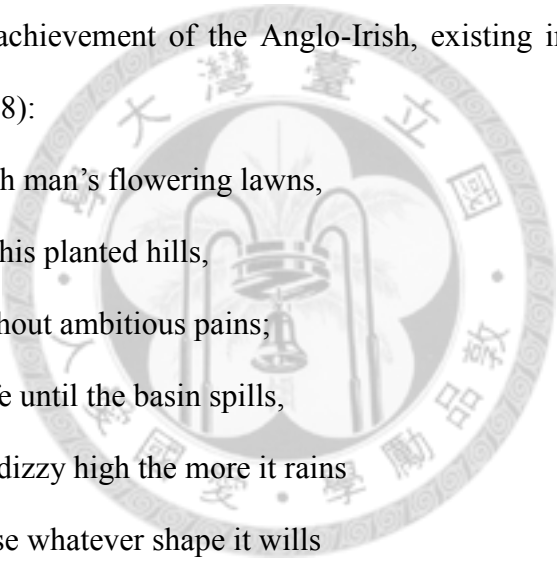
“Meditations in Time of Civil War” is dated 1923, and with that, we are brought back to an earlier stage of emotional agitation, as if what is achieved in “The Tower” is once again

offset. As the title of the sequence makes direct reference to the Civil War, we expect to find descriptions of and reflections on the war; however, we find instead a sequence consisting of poems that focus on the domestic and personal: except for the first and last poems, the titles of the other five poems all contain the strong first person possessive pronoun, “my,” four of which are directly related to Thoor Ballylee. Titles such as “My House,” “My Table,” or “The Stare’s Nest by My Window” could not be further removed from a sequence that purports to meditate on the Civil War. However, by focusing on the tower with such insistence, the poems not only point to the poet’s besieged state (suggested by the nature of the tower as a defense), but also highlight the relation between place and the creative process. As I have suggested, Yeats did not rest content with establishing the tower as a symbol for the fortified spirit. The complication of the symbol is typical of Yeatsian aesthetics, which always suggest contradiction, conflict, and antithesis. Rather than suggesting that Yeats’s tower is a stable symbol for his envisioned unity of being, I argue that the tower is the locus of conflicting perspectives and values, which *in turn* helps him to generate the ideal image for that unity.

The overall structure of “Meditations in Time of Civil War” traces a trajectory of perspectives and scenes arguably reminiscent of the gyre, narrowing first and then expanding outward again. The sequence opens with the broad perspective of “Ancestral Houses,” which meditates on the founding generation of the Anglo-Irish and the Big Houses; it then narrows to “My House,” setting the scene at Thoor Ballylee, and further narrows inward to the particularized perspective in “My Table”; at the narrowest point, the sequence expands, first in time by imagining the future in “My Descendants,” then in space by moving outward from the tower in “The Road at My Door” and “The Stare’s Nest by My Window”; finally, it concludes with a vision that combines and confounds time and space in “I See Phantoms of Hatred and of the Heart’s Fullness and of the Coming Emptiness.” The gyre in Yeats’s philosophical system often appears as double gyres intersecting each other and existing as the complementary opposites of each other, and is used to symbolize the movement of the mind,

whether of history or of the individual life. We are reminded of Yeats's numerous mention of the "winding stair" in his tower, which suggests that for him, the gyre is an integral part of the tower symbol. Thus, by imitating the shape of the Yeatsian gyre, the sequence is further linked to his tower.

If there is much Anglo-Irish posturing in part three of "The Tower," the underlying complications and crisis of the identification are openly expressed in the first poem, "Ancestral Houses." Written in *ottava rima* stanzas, which for Yeats symbolized "courtliness," "stateliness," and "aristocratic personhood" (Vendler, *Our Secret Discipline* 263), "Ancestral Houses" introduces the image of the self-sustaining and regenerative "fountain" as the emblem of the cultural achievement of the Anglo-Irish, existing in a world of "privileged enclosure" (Archibald 128):



Surely among a rich man's flowering lawns,
Amid the rustle of his planted hills,
Life overflows without ambitious pains;
And rains down life until the basin spills,
And mounts more dizzy high the more it rains
As though to choose whatever shape it will
And never stoop to a mechanical
Or servile shape, at others' beck and call. (*VP* 417)

The suggestion of the self-sustaining and proud will recalls the "upstanding men" that "[g]ave, though free to refuse" in "The Tower." The association with the great estates—the Big Houses—such as Coole, is almost immediate and inevitable, although in "Ancestral Houses" the image is representative of a whole tradition. As Marjorie Howes points out, "[t]he estate itself embodies an originary natural energy and the principle of continuity through which it may be sustained" (121). Such serene beauty and the image of the "abounding glittering jet," born out of "life's own self-delight," is now lost, as the speaker

admits that it is no longer the “fountain” but “some marvellous empty sea-shell flung / Out of the obscure dark of the rich streams” that is “the symbol which / Shadows the inherited glory of the rich” (*VP* 417-418). Social and historical decline is implied by the sharp contrast between overflowing life and the marvelous but now empty sea-shell that has become separated from its origins in the “rich streams.” The “inherited glory of the rich” now is merely the shadow of the original nobility. The decline is further elaborated in the third stanza, which also introduces the anxiety of class degeneration. The “sweetness” and “gentleness” created by the “violent and bitter man” may come to naught: “But when the master’s buried mice can play / And maybe the great-grandson of that house, / For all its bronze and marble, ‘s but a mouse” (*VP* 418). Kiberd thus argues that “[t]he images of harmony are deceptive, created to sooth the sensibilities of warlike founders with an illusion of civilization, only for the beneficiaries of a merely inherited glory to show a weaker bloom” (*Irish Classics*, 457).

Critics have identified the anxiety of class degeneration expressed in “Ancestral Houses” and “My Descendants,” both of which demonstrate Yeats’s preoccupation with the decline of the Anglo-Irish caste. Howes reads the whole sequence as one of Yeats’s Big House poems, which often display his ambivalence towards his Anglo-Irish nationality. She argues that “Ancestral Houses” is both eulogy and satire, the former lamenting the “lost community” represented by the house, while the latter castigating the current Anglo-Irish for not living up to its former glory. By emphasizing “violence” and “bitterness,” “Ancestral Houses” underlines Yeats’s acknowledgement that Anglo-Irish civilization is “based on barbarism, that its rich cultural identity originates in crime and violence” (Howes 105). However, the ambivalence is “in the mode of irony rather than indictment; for the Yeats of this period, violence and greatness, blood and power go together” (105). Another aspect of the ambiguity arises from the verb “take” in the last lines of the last stanzas: “But take our greatness with our violence”; “But take our greatness with our bitterness.” The verb can

either be read as “take away,” implying the loss of greatness, or “take on,” stressing the coexistence of greatness and violence/bitterness. Significantly, in “Ancestral Houses,” Yeats identifies himself with the founding generation of the Anglo-Irish, whose greatness is now lost; the first person plural possessive pronoun “our” stands for his open identification, a “class assertion, a declaration of allegiance in the face of decline and decay” (Archibald 129).

“Ancestral Houses” thus re-introduces a moment of crisis, this time imagined as the broader crisis of class degeneration and the collapse of civilization. If in the past, violence and bitterness engendered the “gardens where the peacock strays / With delicate feet upon old terraces,” or “the glory of escutcheoned doors, / And buildings that a haughtier age designed” (*VP* 418), now, in the midst of Civil War, violence only breeds more violence. If the image of harmony and peace in “Ancestral Houses” is merely a delusion, and add to that the crisis of degeneration, then once again the situation requires a shift in perspective. As such, the shift to the second poem of the sequence, “My House,” is in itself significant, since it immediately presents a sharp contrast from the “flowering lawns” (now lost) of “Ancestral Houses.” Also, from “My House” onward to the penultimate poem, “The Stare’s Nest by My Window,” a persistent first person possessive “my” runs through, as if Yeats was anxious to affirm and create “the tradition of myself,” especially when we remember that “my” or “mine” is rarely used in the title of his poetry (similarly, the first person pronoun “I,” as used in the last poem of the sequence, is equally rare). Heaney argues that “this obsessive ‘my’ is also conceivably a symptom of a last ditch stand,” since the poet, “thrown back within the final personal ring of defense...can employ as weapons only those things which lie most nakedly to his hand or most indelibly inside his mind” (*Place of Writing* 25-26). The Anglo-Irish heritage, so proudly recalled in “The Tower,” does not bring consolation against Civil War and all its resultant destruction; instead, the proud posturing in the previous poem only intensifies the sense of crisis. The poet, besieged by the Civil War, turns again to his tower.

Foster observes that whereas “Ancestral Houses” is “flowing, classical, and polished,

like the houses it describes, 'My House' is deliberately irregular, summoning up a different kind of building, and an alternative inheritance[,] which may preserve its own contrasting vitality [for its owner]" (219). In other words, the discrepancy addresses the ambivalence of Yeats's Anglo-Irish identification, in that he deliberately departs from the "rich streams" and resolves to establish a tradition of his own. The structure of "My House" is itself unusual: the first thirteen lines is a continual piling up of images:

An ancient bridge, and a more ancient tower,

A farmhouse that is sheltered by its wall,

An acre of stony ground,

Where the symbolic rose can break in flower,

Old ragged elms, old thorns innumerable,

The sound of the rain or sound

Of every wind that blows;

The stilted water-hen

Crossing stream again

Scared by the splashing of a dozen cows;

A winding stair, a chamber arched with stone,

A grey stone fireplace with an open hearth,

A candle and written page. (*VP* 419)

This meticulously described natural and domestic setting is decidedly unlike its Big House antecedent. Words such as "stony," "ragged," "thorn," or "blows" all suggest the relative sterility and the besieged state of the tower. Replacing the "rich man's flowering lawns" is "[a]n acre of stony ground" where the "symbolic rose" will "break in flower," the verb "break" once again entailing ambiguity, as it suggests both flourishing and destruction. At this point, we might want to ask: what is the effect achieved by spending thirteen lines (almost half of

the poem) in accumulating images? Heaney makes a most fitting comparison, which I quote in length:

["My House"] begins and accumulates its force as a pile-up of nouns wrested from the air and placed like builder's blocks in a course of stonework, each block handled and fitted without the benefit of mortar, which is to say that the nouns function without the bonding action of a main verb. There are thirteen lines of dense affirmative word-chunks which convey an opaque feeling of constituted strength, of gathered, battened-down, self-absorbed power. (*Place of Writing* 26)

As we will see, the idea of building is in fact central to "Meditations in Time of Civil War." At the end of thirteen lines, at this "culmination of physical and linguistic density" (Heaney, *Place of Writing* 26), Yeats finally introduces the action: "*Il Penseroso*'s Platonist toiled on / In some like chamber" (*VP* 419). It is as if "at the climax of solidarity, at the very apotheosis of body-strength and world-thickness, the language calls forth an antithetical mind-strength" (Heaney, *Place of Writing* 26), embodied by the Platonist. We have seen in "The Phases of the Moon" Milton's Platonist, who sat late in some high lonely tower searching for philosophical truth. The reappearance of the Platonist here shifts the focus from concrete objects to imaginative pursuit. The image emphasizes the soul's struggle to discover its anti-self (daemon) out of which may come the creative intensity, "shadowing forth / How the daemonic rage / Imagined everything" (*VP* 419). From this point on, the poem moves outward again, as Yeats imagines that "[b]enighted travellers" have seen the Platonist's candlelight from afar. We can conveniently recall Palmer's illustration, as our gaze now follows that of the travelers, already far from the tower.

In the last stanza, Yeats imagines the first founder of the tower: "A man-at-arms / Gathered a score of horse and spent his days / In this tumultuous spot" (*VP* 420). The military image recalls the "[r]ough men-at-arms" in part two of "The Tower," and here, the nature of the tower as a "tumultuous spot" with a history of conflict is explicitly recognized. By

imagining himself as *the second founder*, Yeats is assuming that characteristic, as well. He will leave behind “[b]efitting emblems of adversity” to his heirs to “exalt a lonely mind”—pride and faith are no longer adequate—in a time of Civil War, the tower itself embodies the “emblem of adversity.” Larrissy goes a step further and argues that Thoor Ballylee is Yeats’s chosen Big House, its relative primitiveness (compared with Coole Park) and lack of grandeur not a deficiency but an expression of his wish to retain violence and bitterness in his character (164-165). He also notes that for Yeats, the idea of violence and bitterness is closely connected to the antithetical, thus making up an indispensable part of his character. Therefore, in “My House,” Yeats has expanded the symbolic dimensions of his tower, at the same time establishing himself by pitting the “heroism of a self-begotten man” against the Anglo-Irish culture founded on barbarism, which inevitably results in enervation (Kiberd, *Irish Classics* 457). The focus on his “ancient” and stony tower and his claim to the place as its second (and also last) founder underlies such process.

There is another interesting point worth mentioning about “My House”: the progression of the poem resembles a “vortex” structure, which may be seen as “a version of the labyrinth and of the gyre” (Vendler, *Our Secret Discipline* 386, n10). On the semantic level, as the poem proceeds, the scene narrows from the outside of the tower (bridge, an acre of stony ground, elms, thorns, water-hen) to the inside of the tower (the winding stair, chamber, fireplace, hearth), until it reaches the narrowest point, where the candle and the written page lie. From there, the poem expands again from the Platonist who “toils on” in the chamber, to the benighted travelers outside and away from the imaginary tower. On the stylistic level, the stanza form and rhythmic structure also reflect the narrowing-widening pattern. I leave more detailed analysis of this particular stanza form to the discussion of “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen,” where it is repeated in part two and part three, adding to the overall unsettling effect of that sequence. For now I only want to briefly point out that the line-length of this stanza also imitates the movement of the gyre: the stanza opens with two

pentameter lines, narrows to a single trimeter, expands again to two pentameters, once again narrows to four trimeters, until finally it concludes in a single pentameter. In this way, “My House,” as a miniature of the sequence in terms of its imitation of the gyre, fittingly incorporates the gyre image into the poem and the poet’s possession.

The third poem, “My Table,” is literally about “the place of writing” and the art created from such a place. The description of Yeats’s writing board, “Two heavy trestles, and a board / Where Sato’s gift, a changeless sword, / By pen and paper lies” (VP 421), leads to his meditation on art and the place and condition that produces and fosters it. At the center stands Sato’s sword, given to Yeats as a gift on one of his American lecture tours, a “changeless work of art,” conceived by “an aching heart.” The sword, at once an art object and an instrument of war, implicitly corresponds to the Anglo-Irish past wherein greatness and civilization are born from violence and bitterness. The hope for historical continuity is indicated by the poet’s imagining of the passing down of the “marvellous accomplishment”; however, the concluding lines of “My Table” dashes such hope: “it seemed / Juno’s peacock screamed” (VP 422). In the 1925 version of *A Vision*, the scream of Juno’s peacock signals the end of one historical cycle and the beginning of the next, the inevitable slide of civilization: “The loss of control over thought comes towards the end; first a sinking in upon the moral being, then the last surrender, the irrational cry, revelation—the scream of Juno’s peacock” (VA 180).

Since such hope for continuity could not be sustained, the sequence moves forward in imaginative time. “My Descendants” engages, with an intensified anxiety, with the idea of progeny. The poem returns to the *ottava rima* of “Ancestral Houses” again; however, the “stately” *ottava rima* used here conveys a different feeling because of the “inner structure” of the stanza: instead of the usual 6-2 division of sense unit in a normal *ottava rima* stanza, the first and second stanzas of “My Descendants” deliberately disrupt the division and are divided into two four-line sense units. A closer examination of the stanzas reveals that the

first two stanzas both enact an antithetical movement from the first sense-unit (the first four lines) to the second (the latter four lines). For instance, the first four lines of the opening stanza proudly acknowledges the “vigorous mind” inherited from his ancestors and declares the hope to leave behind descendants “[a]s vigorous of mind,” only to subside to the dismay in the next four lines, described in the familiar metaphor of the garden, “the torn petals strew the garden plot; / And there’s but common greenness after that” (*VP* 422). The second stanza directly imagines the decline of his line:

And what if my descendants lose the flower
Through natural declension of the soul,
Through too much business with the passing hour,
Through too much play, or marriage with a fool? (*VP* 423)

It is in the next four lines that we see how the place is inseparable from the poet’s imagining of his tradition. The anxiety of degeneration expressed, Yeats conjures up an image of the tower *in ruin*, as if to undo all the labor (implied by “this laborious stair”) with which he has established this place and the tradition of himself. The tower in ruin is paradoxically desirable because his descendants would not possess the “vigorous mind” as befitting of the place:

May this laborious stair and this stark tower
Become a roofless ruin that the owl
May build in the cracked masonry and cry
Her desolation to the desolate sky. (*VP* 423)

The image of the “roofless” tower calls to mind the tower image in the Tarot pack, foreshadowing a moment of crisis and change, though in this case, apparently change for the worse. The “naming” and “settling” that the tower symbolizes for Yeats would also lose its significance and meaning with the evanescence of the “vigorous mind.” Such wish also demonstrates how strongly Yeats wants to maintain a symbolic correspondence between the house/place and its owner.

The image of the tower in ruin, however, contains its own antithesis: the roofless tower in ruin will become the home of owls which “*build* in the cracked masonry” (emphasis mine). Thus, destruction and ruin is considered, paradoxically, coexisting with building and construction, especially instinctive construction in the natural world. The comparison between the human world and the natural world is made clear in the beginning of the next stanza: “The Primum Mobile that fashioned us / Has made the very owls in circles move” (*VP* 423). We have already seen such analogy in part three of “The Tower,” where man’s dream-making is analogous to the instinctive building of the daws, but here the act of building takes on another level of significance by coexisting with the imagined ruin. In the third stanza of “My Descendants,” the anxiety of degeneration is temporarily eased off by, once again, the richness of associations offered by the tower. Vendler has particularly noted the “circular form” of this stanza as departing sharply from the previous two stanzas, which, by their divisions of sense units into two quatrains, display a vertical movement, whereas the third stanza employs a 2-4-2 sense division (*Our Secret Discipline* 267-268). Moreover, the chiasmus in lines 3-6 further strengthens the circular structure, “constructing a circlet enclosing (the unnamed) Augusta Gregory and George Yeats within a wreath of love and friendship” (*Our Secret Discipline* 269):

And I, that count myself most prosperous,
Seeing that love and friendship are enough,
For an old neighbor’s friendship chose the house
And decked and altered it for a girl’s love (*VP* 423)

The changed structure reflects Yeats’s altered perspective. Thus, as “My Descendants” closes, he returns to the idea of his tower as concrete monument: “whatever flourish and decline / These stones remain their monument and mine,” a statement that recalls his prayer in “To be carved on a Stone at Thoor Ballylee”: “And may these characters remain / When all is ruin once again” (*VP* 406). Therefore, even though the decline of his line seems inevitable (so is

the Anglo-Irish caste in general), he has found temporary consolation in the very materiality of his tower, for even the destruction of it would symbolize new life and possibilities.

The next two poems are the only two in the sequence that explicitly make reference to the Civil War. By doing so, they shift the direction of the sequence and introduce the historical realities directly relevant to the Irish context, for the first time, in *The Tower*. “The Road at My Door” is written in the quicker-paced “march-measure” (Vendler, *Our Secret Discipline* 231) of tetrameter cinquains rhyming *abaab* and directly announces the element of anxiety over the role of the national poet as foreshadowed in “The Tower.” It highlights the poet’s artistic isolation and subsequent withdrawal from the world of action and the natural, biological life. Thus, it undermines the temporary contentment reached in the previous poem, as the poet, after exchanging “polite meaningless words” with both sides of the Civil War, turns towards his chamber, “caught / In the cold snows of a dream” (*VP* 424). The violence of the Civil War lies hidden beneath his small talks with the “affable Irregular” and the “brown Lieutenant,” but the obvious implication of violence is present all the same. The apparent discrepancy between the casualness of talks and the bloody aspects of war creates the irony, but we are also surprised to find that the poet’s reaction is envy. As he ascends to his solitary chamber, he is isolated “not only [from] the current social life of brutal wars coexisting with superficial threshold pleasantries but also [from] the natural organic life of sexuality, breeding, and mothering implied by the moor-hen and her young” (Vendler, *Our Secret Discipline* 233). Verse-writing, the “sedentary trade,” seems to bring, inevitably, isolation and immobility. The tower as place of writing has also become a place of bitter isolation by choice.

The sixth poem of the sequence, “The Stare’s Nest by My Window,” is the culmination of Yeats’s meditation on the coexistence of destruction and building, of the foundedness and unfoundedness of his tower. The first stanza creates a seemingly tranquil picture of the natural order in his tower, “the observed ecology of the ancient tower wall” (Foster 221):

The bees build in the crevices

Of loosening masonry, and there

The mother birds bring grubs and flies.

My wall is loosening; honey-bees,

Come build in the empty house of the stare. (*VP* 424)

Here, the “cracked masonry” prophesied in “My Descendants” has become the reality now taking place. However, the presence of the bees suggests that the ruin of the “crevices” and “loosening wall” will be the new source of sweetness and site of building. The possibility of new life leads to the speaker’s evocative prayer in the rest of the poem, as the hoped-for building is sharply contrasted with the brutal realities of the Civil War. The “uncertainty” of the outside world ravaged by Civil War once again strengthens the isolation of the tower and the tower-dweller:

We are closed in, and the key is turned

On our uncertainty; somewhere

A man is killed, or a house burned,

Yet no clear fact to be discerned:

Come build in the empty house of the stare. (*VP* 425)

The next stanza advances to more explicit description of violence: “Last night they trundled down the road / That dead young soldier in his blood” (*VP* 425). A note to his Nobel Prize Lecture shows the “closed-in” uncertainty when he was writing in his tower during the Civil War:

I was in my Galway house during the first months of civil war, the railway bridges blown up and the roads blocked with stones and trees. ... Ford cars passed the house from time to time with coffins standing upon end between the seats, and sometimes at night we heard an explosion, and once by day saw the smoke made by the burning of a great neighbouring house. ... One felt an overmastering desire not to grow unhappy or embittered, not to lose all sense of the beauty of nature. A stare (our West of Ireland

name for a starling) had built in a hole beside my window and I made these verses out of the feeling of the moment.... (Au 522-523, n8)

Later on he mentioned that “I began to smell honey in places where honey could not be, at the end of a stone passage or at some windy turn of the road, and it came always with certain thoughts” (Au 523, n8). The honey-bees are evoked as a source for hoped-for sweetness in the middle of uncertainty and destruction. We would also be reminded of the “bee-loud glade” of Innisfree, where the young Yeats had wished to live. The natural scene and the honey-bees represent an imaginative response to savagery needing to be made on an altogether different plane. The evocative refrain of “Come build in the empty house of the stare” that closes each stanza is thus significant. In the first stanza, the poet’s invitation of the honey-bees appears to be following naturally from its preceding lines describing natural order; however, in the rest of the poem, this prayer is uttered “against the overwhelming and reiterated evidence of violence” (Vendler, *Our Secret Discipline* 235). Vendler particularly notes that this line of refrain “sounds out a rising dance-lilt in its iambs and anapests” (235), arguing that the “stubborn” reappearances of the trisyllabic feet (anapest) in this line stand as counter force against the normalcy of disyllabic feet in its preceding four lines, and that the “trisyllabic accent, reconceiving what a four-beat line might sound like in a more hopeful moment, mitigate the otherwise despairing wartime brutality of the poem’s tetrameters” (236).

Cullingford has observed that “the idea of ‘building’ in both the literal and symbolic sense dominates [the sequence]...the tower, paradoxical image of [Yeats’s] longing for permanence and his knowledge of decay, stands at the center of the sequence” (“How Many Jacques Molay Got Up The Tower” 771). It is in “The Stare’s Nest by My Window” that the coexistence of ruin and destruction is most forcibly projected, as the empty nest of the stare may become where the honey-bees come and build. As Kiberd astutely puts it, in Yeats’s aesthetic theory, “all creation was implicated in a sense of compromise and loss” (*Irish Classics* 452). He argues that “[t]he more ruinous the tower seems, the more it becomes a site

of breeding, fecundity and creation,” pointing out that Yeats “observes how nature asserts its daily defiance of the death instinct,” and adding that “[t]he disintegration of one edifice becomes the very condition for erecting another” (457). As the Tarot Tower may favorably suggest, the moment of imminent change can also bring renovating inspiration, at once the “Destroyer” *and* the “Preserver.”

One last thing worth mentioning about this part is how its last stanza opens. While it opens, as in the second stanza, with “we,” the first person plural pronoun conveys a very different meaning, because it admits shared responsibility of having “fed the heart on fantasies” (*VP* 425). Howes argues that “[w]hether ‘we’ refers to the occupants of the house alone, to the Anglo-Irish generally, or to the whole Irish nation, the poem’s major movement shatters its illusion and takes that ‘we’ from innocence to guilt, from claiming external dangers to acknowledging internal responsibility, and from ignorance and uncertainty to knowledge of cause and effect” (130). It is the poetic voice that will fully emerge in “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen,” no longer as the isolated “I,” the “en-towered poet, perched lonely above his benighted countrymen” (Archibald 133), but the “we” that acknowledges participation and responsibility. This acknowledged guilt would finally lead to the troublesome vision that infuses blindness and indifference, presented in the three sets of images in the concluding poem.

The final poem of the sequence, returning to the inside of the tower, invokes visions in much the same way as “The Second Coming,” as the speaker climbs to the “tower-top” and leans “upon broken stone,” when “frenzies bewilder, reveries perturb the mind; / Monster familiar images swim to the mind’s eye” (*VP* 426). These image abruptly shifts the scenario from present Irish context to eighteenth-century France, as the cry goes up calling for the “vengeance on the murderers of Jacques Molay,” and

The rage-driven, rage-tormented, and rage-hungry troop,
Trooper belabouring trooper, biting at arm or at face,

Plunges towards nothing, arms and fingers spreading wide

For the embrace of nothing (*VP* 426)

Yeats explains in the note that “[a] cry for vengeance because of the murderers of the Grand Master of the Templars seems to me fit symbol for those who labour for hatred, and so for sterility in various kinds” (*VP* 827). While eighteenth-century France seems far removed from local context, Cullingford has pointed out that the vengeance for Jacques Molay is in fact a fitting commentary on the Civil War, as “[w]hat began as the struggle to avenge a genuine wrong, and to gain Ireland’s independence from England, has degenerated into fratricidal strife [in the Civil War]” (“How Many Jacques Molay Got Up The Tower” 765). The labor for hatred has only produced a whirlwind of violence, bringing mere sterility. Thus, this poem in fact more forcibly and relentlessly comments on the violence of the Civil War, with a note of bitterness at the Irish present that remains locked in the past. However, this image of the “rage-driven troops,” as the next image of the “self-delighting reverie,” both give place to “an indifferent multitude, give place / To brazen hawks” (*VP* 427). The hawks, “birds of prey,” for Yeats “symbolize the straight road to logic, and so of mechanism” (*VP* 827). Their “innumerable clanging wings” have eclipsed the moon. Once again, Yeats turns away from the realities (though presented as “[m]onstrous familiar images”) and withdraws to the inside of his tower. In the last stanza, he turns away from the realities, and gathers his themes—of ambition and desire, and of action and meditation—with a note of “autobiographical interrogation” that unites the sequence “with a commentary on Irish history in flux” (Foster 222):

I turn away and shut the door, and on the stair

Wonder how many times I could have proved my worth

In something that all others understand or share;

But O! ambitious heart, had such a proof drawn forth

A company of friends, a conscience set at ease,

It had but made us pine the more. The abstract joy,
The half-read wisdom of daemonic images,
Suffice the ageing man as once the growing boy. (*VP* 427)

Foster argues that “solitude, self-knowledge, and resilience constitute the bitter lesson learned at the end” (223), to which I add that it is Yeats’s boldness to face the emptiness underneath his chosen artistic solitude and to question the validity of his symbol that truly guarantees the credibility of his art. As Archibald observes, the sequence “recognizes and accepts the full complexity and pain of the poet-senator situation” (136).

“Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen,” a sequence of six parts, like “Meditations in Time of Civil War” before it, contemplates on contemporary Irish history of the early 1920s with piercing bitterness. In fact, “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen” is often considered together with its predecessor in *The Tower*, since both are long sequences on war and share several thematic concerns. However, their achieved effects are distinctly different. While both can be regarded, in part, as dealing with the historical realities of wars and the drama of Yeats’s response to them, “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen” is explicitly concerned with violence, and posits a more troubled position towards the historical context on which it meditates. It also casts doubt on the artistic enterprise and artistic faith in a more stinging manner. As the following analysis will show, the sequence is also more historically-charged, not just with contemporary Irish events, but also with a more general philosophizing of the cycles of history.

The title of this sequence has generated much critical attention, not only because of the formality in which it appears (as “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen,” instead of numerical numbers, as with “Easter, 1916” or “September 1913”), but also because of the date as a deliberate misdating. Recent scholarship has established the actual date of composition (or at least the time at which the sequence was finished) as 1921, instead of its designated date of

1919 appended at the end of the poem.⁸ In fact, when it was first published in *The Dial* in September 1921, it bore a different title, “Thoughts upon the Present State of the World.” It was not until the sequence was placed as the last of the four dated poems at the opening section of *The Tower* that it was re-titled and the postscript date “1919” was added. Whereas the original title serves to present the artist’s subjective meditations on the “state of the world,” much the same way as “Meditations in Time of Civil War” does, the new title highlights the centrality of the year, and instead communicates a sense of “objective truth and the weight of history and historiography” (Doggett 74). Nicholas Green argues that “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen” represents a case of Yeats’s strategy of “creative misdating,” where the assigned (misdated) year written out in letters is closely connected to his view of approaching apocalypse (20). This view is echoed by Foster’s observation that “the eventual title might also signify [Yeats’s] preoccupation with historical cycles lasting around 2000 years” (193). The date 1919 would of course have historical significance in the Irish context, as well, as it would be identified with the beginning of a new era after the European War and also the beginning of the Anglo-Irish War. Therefore, the re-titling already accentuates Yeats’s preoccupation with history as implicated in the Irish context. Moreover, it creates an irony arising from the discrepancy between the seemingly objective title and the deeply troubled meditation on violence and disillusionment.

As the last poem in a group of deliberately dated poems in the opening section of *The Tower*, the puzzle created by the re-dating and re-titling of “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen” should be considered in relation to the dating pattern of the first four poems. Observing this deliberate arrangement of reverse chronology, Grene argues that the dates of composition “become signs that support a deliberately recessive movement of the four poems taken in the order Yeats designed for them at the start of *The Tower*” (25). The continuation of themes is also set in a similar reverse order: “[e]ach of the poems in this [group] takes off from the

⁸ Manuscript materials indicate that the sequence was composed by early April 1921 (*Mm* xlii).

previous one, undoing what the previous poem has seemed to have closed off, opening out as the focus moves backward in time” (25). In other words, the four dated poems in the opening section, “Sailing to Byzantium” (dated 1927), “The Tower” (dated 1926), “Meditations in Time of Civil War” (dated 1923), and “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen” (dated 1919) can be seen as a “sequence” that “dreams back” in time from 1927, taking the readers backward through the early years of the Free State, to the Civil War, and finally to the Anglo-Irish War, as horrors of the wars are relived, the “sequence” becoming increasingly historically-charged. Brown also observes:

The implication of this dreaming back through a historical period is that the aesthetic and philosophic aspirations of “Sailing to Byzantium” and “The Tower” are recollected by the reader as responses to the horrors that follow them in the text. Powerful as these two poems are, and though they are dated and placed as if to suggest a culmination in the poet’s wisdom and poetic power, their momentary visions of stasis and the calm of a hard-achieved, philosophic mind seem, in a sequential reading, no match for what follows them. (317)

He further contends that the force of the latter two poems is such “as to cast in radical doubt the ways in which the poet has sought through the sequence to allow art and wisdom redemptive valency in a disordered world” (317). If “Meditations in Time of Civil War” still allows some hope by juxtaposing sweetness with violence, foundedness with unfoundedness, in “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen,” such hope is relentlessly dashed, and the enigma of human violence seems to remain irresolvable. What I want to add here is that while the latter two poems, especially “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen,” seem to cancel the hard-won artistic faith in the first two, they also significantly represent Yeats’s wish to engage in a “critically detached reexamination of Ireland’s violent past and present” (Doggett 98). The bitterness and self-critique that run through the two sequences are the result of that reexamination. Yeats has demonstrated readiness to question his artistic faith in “Meditations

in Time of Civil War”; in “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen,” he would need to acknowledge collective guilt and further question his role as a national artist amidst Ireland’s struggle to independence.

Part one of “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen” is written, as part one of “Meditations in Time of Civil War,” in *ottava rima* stanzas. It opens with the images of the “ingenious lovely things”—the “olive wood” image of Athena, Phidias’ “famous ivories,” and the “golden grasshoppers and bees”—that are “gone” (*VP* 428), expressed in the first stanza with a mood not of nostalgia but of grim acceptance. The next stanza moves to the recent past, as the collective “we” is introduced with a sense of self-derision: “We too had many pretty toys when young”; as “law” and “public opinion” are referred to as “pretty toys,” this stanza posits an irony and implicit mockery at the naïve innocence of the poet’s past belief, when the collective “we” had harbored false “fine thoughts.” The “Parliament” and “king” in the next stanza carries on the irony and brings the context to the immediately present, and we now realize that the grim truth is that art, the “ingenious lovely things,” does not stay; nevertheless, war and violence are a recurring reality.

The next stanza contains perhaps the most scathing description of wartime violence in the whole of *The Tower*, as it abruptly and sharply shifts the focus to the anarchy in the local context of the present and to the horrors of the Anglo-Irish War:

Now days are dragon-ridden, the nightmare
Rides upon sleep: a drunken soldiery
Can leave the mother, murdered at her door,
To crawl in her own blood, and go scot-free (*VP* 429, emphasis mine)

The “mother” referred to here is Eileen Quinn, who, as Lady Gregory’s journal records, was “shot dead...with her child in her arms’ by Black and Tans soldiers shooting from a passing lorry” (*P* 652). This is the atrocity that generates the question asked of Robert Gregory’s ghost in the unpublished “Reprisals”:

Where may new-married women sit
And suckle children now? Armed men
May murder them in passing by
Nor law nor parliament take heed. (*VP* 791)

In “Reprisals,” both the agency and the location are clearly named—“armed men” may murder Gregory’s Kiltartan tenants while England remains indifferent. However, in “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen,” the factual details are somewhat clouded, making the violence seem part of a larger and more abstract whirlwind of chaos. Thus, even though the allusion can be easily identified, the vagueness of factual details and deliberate avoidance of active agency (the mother is “murdered,” not the soldiery “murders”) suggest the fear that the atrocity belongs to a larger, less comprehensible phenomenon of violence. The stanza then sinks into a sort of self-mockery and rejection of the belief that philosophy ever works, for “we” who resorted to philosophy are but “weasels fighting in a hole” (*VP* 429). This stanza, though still in *ottava rima*, cannot retain the steady pacing of a normal *ottava rima* stanza. Words of a “raw reality” fill the space: “drunken,” “murdered,” “crawl,” “scot-free,” “sweat,” “weasels,” outnumbering and indeed surrounding the discredited “elevated” words such as “thoughts” and “philosophy,” and the rhymes are slant rhymes at best. Thus, the “headlong pace” of this stanza corresponds to the disrupted and undermined ceremoniousness of the original *ottava rima* (Vendler, *Our Secret Discipline* 267). At the end of part one, the poem returns to where it had begun, the classical imagery of fine arts and the civilization it represents, only to admit that belief in the permanence of art is but an illusion, for “[m]an is in love and loves what vanishes” (*VP* 429). It also darkly acknowledges man’s destructive tendency, symbolized by such harsh verbs as “burn,” “break,” and “traffic.”

As has been suggested, when Yeats applies Roman numerals to the sections of his sequence, he means it to indicate a change in physical or mental location. This is again testified by the abrupt shift from the disillusionment of part one to the descriptions of Loie

Fuller's dancers in part two:

When Loie Fuller's Chinese dancers enwound
A shining web, a floating ribbon of cloth,
It seemed that a dragon of air
Had fallen among dancers, had whirled them round
Or hurried them off on its own furious path (*VP* 430)

The dancers' movements create a great storm, "a dragon of air," which simultaneously threatens to devour and dancers and carry them on "its own furious path," so that they, too, like the present state of the world, seem "dragon-ridden." Surprisingly, the dance is then compared to the pattern of recurring historical cycles, that of the "Platonic Year" that "[w]hirls out new right and wrong, / Whirls in the old instead," suggesting that new right and wrong are merely exchanged for the old ones. The anxiety arises out of the second metaphor, as "men" are equated with the dancers, and they seem only able to blindly follow the "barbarous clangour of a gong," which confirms the assertion of "grim determinism" and "oriental march of fate" (Wood 52). The Platonic Year, which in Yeats's calculation encompasses a 26,000-year span, suggests, according to Michael Wood, "an order that can subsume all disorders, contain any amount of violence and turbulence without betraying their unruly, necessary energy" (60). It represents the largest motion of the cosmos, the journey of the constellations through the entire zodiac. However, as it only "whirls in the old instead," it appears that historical cycles only repeat the "dragon-ridden" days of chaos, faced with which men can only blindly follow.

Part two is written in the same stanza form as "My House" in "Meditations in Time of Civil War." Here, it is a "triply unsettling" stanza that juxtaposes symmetrical semantic units with asymmetrical rhymes and rhythms (Vendler, *Our Secret Discipline* 69). While the whole stanza is in fact an extended sentence divided symmetrically by the semicolon at the end of the fifth line, the rhymes follow an asymmetrical 6-4 pattern of sestet and quatrain, rhyming

abcabcdeed. The rhythmic pattern further complicates the incongruity by exhibiting the shape of a “double gyre”—as pentameters narrow to trimeter, broaden again to pentameter, narrow again to trimeter, and finally end in a pentameter that stabilizes the dance rhythm of its precedent trimeters (69-70). In terms of the gyre, we would be reminded of Yeats’s explanation of the gyre in the note to “The Second Coming,” a poem so much concerned about the “revelation” which is about to take over the “anarchy” and the “blood-dim tide” loosed upon the world. The double cone, which serves as a mathematical diagram for the progression of the human soul, can also be used to understand history. Yeats explains that the double cone figure is “true also of history, for the end of an age, which always receives the revelation of the character of the next age, is represented by the coming of one gyre to its place of greatest expansion and of the other to that of its greatest contraction” (*VP* 824-825). He adds that “[a]ll our scientific, democratic, fact-accumulating, heterogeneous civilization belongs to the outward gyre and prepares not the continuance of itself but the revelation as in a lightning flash . . . of the civilization that must slowly take its place” (*VP* 825). The lightning-as-revelation again brings to mind the apocalyptic suggestion of the Tarot Tower, but in part two of “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen,” the Platonic Year only brings back the “old wrong,” the anarchy and blood-dimed tide. This poses doubt over the validity of his philosophy, a doubt that was echoed in a letter to Shakespear in early 1921, as he was writing the sequence. He spoke of the sequence as “not philosophical but simple & passionate, a lamentation over lost peace & lost hope,” and added, “[m]y own philosophy does not much brighten the prospect” (*CL*, 9 April 1921). He had viewed his philosophy in *A Vision* as a “last act of defense against the chaos of the world” (*CL*, to Edmund Dulac, 23 April 1923); therefore, this doubt over his philosophy is particularly unsettling. However, as Wood argues, what seems to make his philosophy unavailing in “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen” is not the violence and turbulence depicted, but “the absence of any alternative to sour disappointment and mockery” (59). And indeed, what “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen”

most poignantly presents is a time and generation lost in disillusionment and disbelief.

Part three is also written in the same stanza form as part two. In this part, the irregular stanza is used to represent “the windings of a labyrinth, Yeats’s own maze of ‘art and politics’” (Vendler, *Our Secret Discipline* 70). Part three briefly returns to the artist’s lonely triumph, as Yeats once again summons the swan as the image of “the solitary soul.” This is the swan that fixes its eye on the “fading gleam” in pride, facing sure knowledge of death and destruction in “The Tower.” For a brief moment, Yeats seems to suggest the possibility of a counter-force against the “dragon-ridden” days, as the swan,

The wings half spread for flight,

The breast thrust out in pride

Whether to play, or to ride

Those winds that clamour of approaching night. (*VP* 430-431)

With the implied strength and pride, the swan/soul can still choose to play or to ride as it faces approaching apocalypse. This first stanza temporarily returns to the pride of bequest enacted in “The Tower” as recourse to the problem of old age: this is the poetic voice asserting itself against destruction, and fittingly, this is the only place in the whole sequence that is voiced from an “I” perspective (“Some moralist or mythological poet / Compares the solitary soul to a swan; / I am satisfied with that”). More generally, it can be argued that part three of the sequence is centered on the artist’s meditation on his art and his dream-making, and is a brief return to the preoccupations in the earlier three poems in *The Tower*. However, as this sequence challenges every belief once held dear, so the artist’s solitary triumph, embodied by the swan poised for flight, is but an illusion. In the second stanza, the danger of being deluded by self-created images returns, the man “lost amid the labyrinth that he has made / In art or politics.” Because “triumph can but mar our solitude,” solitary pride in the first stanza is disappointed. Therefore, in the last stanza of part three, the swan “has leaped into the desolate heaven,” the moment of choice already past. The image of the swan in the

desolate heaven motivates a tendency to self-obliteration, as the image can

...bring a rage

To end all things, to end

What my laborious life imagined, even

The half-imagined, the half-written page; (*VP* 431)

It is not only a crisis of the imagination and poetic vocation, but also of the illusory nature of believing and dreaming, as the poet now realizes that “we were crack-pated when we dreamed” (*VP* 431). Thus, even though the first stanza seems to announce a proud gesture of poetic aspiration, the latter two stanzas admit that a man is, like those who blindly follow images in “The Tower,” lost amid his own meditation, while those who dream, including the poet, find their dreams gone unfulfilled and derided. The voice returns to “we,” once again admitting a collective guilt.

The sequence then sinks sharply into a series of bitter self-mockery, as the “labyrinthine” stanzas of the previous two parts change into the trochee-dominated fourth part, the shortest one in the sequence. In this part, the image of the proud swan is replaced by the weasel, which reiterates the self-abasement in part one and admits complicity: “we” are but weasels fighting in a hole, and “we” even delight in the discovery of being weasels. Thus, in part five, he turns to mocking the great, the wise, and the good, made all the more forceful by the exhortation to mockery (“Come let us mock...”) from the first person plural point of view, making mockery a collective pleasure. However, in the last stanza, he turns upon himself, mocking his own mockery and castigating himself and his companions for not helping the “good, wise or great / To bar that foul storm out,” because “we / Traffic in mockery” (*VP* 432). This final stanza bitterly accedes that the poet is no less responsible for the current violence that was raging through Ireland, because he, like the others, had refused to take action. Nevertheless, as we have seen in both “Meditations in Time of Civil War” and in the previous sections in this sequence, those who labor for hatred only plunge towards

nothing, and those who dream of bringing the world under a rule with philosophy can only expect similar futility. In this final stanza, the action of trafficking, so unthinkable in part one of the sequence, has become what the poet and his companions do: they “traffic in mockery.” This stands as a downright critique of the national poet’s role and the questioning of his artistic enterprise, so that now it is not merely the problem of old age, but the most direct questioning of the validity of his art and his role as a poet.

The last part of “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen” is the only place in the sequence where the word “violence” occurs, which immediately repeats itself: “Violence upon the roads: violence of horses” (*VP* 432). It may suggest that “the two violences—the historical nightmare and the apocalyptic vision—are intimately connected” (Wood 201). However, the colon after the first “violence” implies that the actual violence taking place in Galway and Ireland is being transformed into an imaginary apparition of horses, which, “wearied” by their repeated courses, “all break and vanish.” In his note to the poem, Yeats cites the country people as the source of the horse image, who “see at times certain apparitions whom they name now ‘fallen angels,’ now ‘ancient inhabitants of the country,’ and describe as riding at whiles ‘with flowers upon the heads of the horses’” (*VP* 433). In his modification of the image, Yeats comments, “I have assumed in the sixth poem that these horsemen, now that the times worsen, give way to worse” (*VP* 433). And indeed they give way to worse, as “evil gathers head: / Herodias’ daughters have returned again” (*VP* 433). The daughters of Herodias are “emblems of blind passion, willful destruction, and labyrinthine purposelessness” (Archibald 121), whom Yeats also associates with the Sidhe, which is “also Gaelic for wind, and certainly the Sidhe have to do the wind. They journey in whirling winds, the winds that were called the dance of the daughters of Herodias in the Middle Ages” (*VP* 800). The daughters come with “[t]hunder of feet, tumult of images,” their purpose as incomprehensible as the labyrinthine wind. They are also objects of desire, and therefore their return also signals the ever-returning desire, blind and capricious.

It might seem that the images summoned up in the concluding section of “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen” are as incomprehensible as their appearance. However, as Vendler notes, the “unrestrained horses” and the “clamorous dancers” are “merely visible symbols of a hidden turbulence that invisibly and unaccountably generates them” (*Our Secret Discipline* 75). The final image comes much the same way as the rough beast of “The Second Coming” does:

But now wind drops, dust settles; thereupon
There lurches past, his great eyes without thought
Under the shadow of stupid straw-pale locks,
That insolent fiend Robert Artisson
To whom the love-lorn Lady Kyteler brought
Bronzed peacock feathers, red combs of her cocks. (*VP* 433)

Robert Artisson, “an evil spirit much run after in Kilkeeny at the start of the fourteenth century” (*VP* 433), is, similar to the daughters of Herodias, an object of desire, and, specifically, sexual desire. His appearance reveals the origin of human violence: endless and unsatisfied desire, irrational and inexplicable. He “lurches past” just as the rough beast “slouches towards Bethlehem,” and gazes “without thought,” his visage “stupid” because he is “simply an agent of cyclical history” (Doggett 80-81). The peacock that strays in the gardens of the Big Houses, whose scream signals the end of one historical cycle and the beginning of the next, is presented here as a severed image and devoid of life, the “bronzed peacock feathers” used as vain sacrifice for the fiend. The conclusion of this part and thus the whole sequence suggests an “uprising of dark impulse” and the resignation of “the possibility of any rational explanation of human violence and cultural destruction” (Vendler, *Our Secret Discipline* 77).

Unlike “Meditations in Time of Civil War,” “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen” does not contain titles for each section. While we know that the imposition of Roman numerals before

each section indicates the change in mental “stations,” the disparate forms of each section, diverse in style and length, only add to the puzzling feeling conveyed by the sequence. How should we understand the progression of the sequence? What does it suggest in terms of Yeats’s response to the chaos during the war? Vendler forcibly argues that the order of the sequence contains an implicit argument about Yeats’s successive responses to violence: the sequence begins, as an initial response to contemporary turbulence, with the attempt to find answer in the “intellectual tools of historical analogy and philosophical speculation,” followed by an espousal of a “resigned determinism...evoked by the Platonic Year”; then comes the bitter recognition that the vanishing of cherished lovely things is inevitable, which leads to the desire for self-destruction; what follows is the discovery of one’s complicity in the social and political disorder, which brings self-accusation in favor of any effort at intellectualizing; the only defense against complicity is “an admission that, like everyone else, one is driven by implacable irrational impulses, sexual and violent, that are ultimately inexplicable” (*Our Secret Discipline* 77). Read from this perspective, “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen” forces the poet to acknowledge his desire to make sense of human violence, and yet simultaneously presents a final skepticism about the viability of such sense-making. The effort and struggle to read the signs of history only leads to an incomprehensible labyrinth and inevitable defeat. Thus, the postscript date “1919,” which immediately follows the peacock feathers and red combs, is entirely ironic. Its suggestion of objective point of view and the historical certainty it evokes are totally at odds with the blind desire and tumult of images that close the sequence. Yeats’s intention with creating such an irony dramatizes his wish to disengage with the historically-laden narrative that seeks to find meanings in the violence that it has generated. The dreaming back through a tumultuous time in Ireland’s recent past signals not a wish to revisit those recent horrors, but a desire to gain a new perspective in re-viewing them. The “sequence” that begins with “Sailing to Byzantium” and ends in “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen” has prompted him towards a disengagement with

the immediate historical realities that only repeat violence and stagnation. The poet, through this dreaming back, has understood that he would need more than an indomitable spirit to face the crisis and doubts that has come to assault him from different aspects. His meditation on his place of writing and all that it symbolizes has initiated him on a series of inward-directed contemplation on the meaning and function of artistic creation, on the validity of his rightful place to take part in the founding of his nation, and on his own self-identification. It is because the poetic imagination can transform the place into an imaginative space from which he now reexamines the recent past that the volume can now turn to more generalized contemplation on time, history, and age, in preparation for another reengagement with the present.

Disengagement and Reengagement: The Middle Poems

Since the first four poems of *The Tower* constitute a sequence that enacts a dreaming back in time, a re-living of the recent violence in contemporary Ireland, what follows is the emergence of a new poetic voice after the dreaming back. But how do we read it as continuing the journey of *The Tower*? To answer this question, I believe it is necessary to revisit “Sailing to Byzantium” in terms of how time and space are meditated upon. As I have mentioned, “Sailing to Byzantium” registers a desire “for a new comprehension of time and of self-willed exile” (Doggett 99), because the world in which the poet lives is “caught in that sensual music” and locked in the self-repeating cycle of life and death. The hoped-for incarnation as a golden bird singing “[o]f what is past, or passing, or to come” in the Byzantine palace is an envisioned solution to “that” country trapped in the cycle of “[being] begotten, born, and dies” (VP 407); it is the antithesis of what is rejected in the opening stanzas of the poem. However, the seemingly achieved triumph at the close is not only a state yet to be fulfilled, but also highly qualified, for the bird is “set upon” the bough to sing, suggesting that it is a “subordinate image,” devoid of agency. The triumph is gained, as

Kiberd argues, “at the cost of mobility and growth” (*Inventing Ireland* 441). This lack of agency is partly why this self-willed exile will not work, for it only represents another form of being trapped. Thus the need to dream back, to “relive the recent past in order to imagine a new future, a new Ireland” (Doggett 100).

“Meditations in Time of Civil War” and “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen” fulfill that process, as we are brought face to face with the horrors and violence of Ireland’s recent past, the “worse evil” prophesized at the end of “The Tower.” As has been shown, the two sequences demonstrate how, locked in the labor for hatred and endless desire to be enchanted, history has become nightmare, days become “dragon-ridden,” and the struggle to make sense of history only engenders trafficking in mockery and blindness. As the poet emerges from this “sequence” of dreaming back, he is ready to adopt new perspectives to meditate on time and the human condition in a detached manner, a disengagement from the immediately relevant history. Therefore, the following three poems, “The Wheel,” “Youth and Age,” and “The New Faces,” represent a more generalized meditation on the old theme of the crisis of old age and the questioning of the poet’s role. “The Wheel,” which immediately follows “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen” and its ominous revelation of apocalypse to come, shifts the focus from time understood with respect to history to time understood in the human condition of life and death. The argument of “The Wheel” is that our constant yearning and discontent in every season is actually a longing “for the tomb” (*VP* 434), the final quiescence of death. The next poem, “Youth and Age,” carries on the theme of inevitable death. It briefly returns to historical time by its appended date, 1924, a time after the Civil War and in the beginning years of the Free State. While the date sounds a note of anxiety for the ageing poet, who by now is a “parting guest” speeded by the world’s “flattering tongue” (*VP* 434), the poem, however, consigns “rage” to the poet’s younger days, and makes the departure for death seem a flattered matter. The next poem, “The New Faces,” further establishes the ghostly shadows of the dead as more existential than the living. This poem was written as early as 1912 (*Mem*

267) as a premature apprehension of Lady Gregory's death. In this poem, Yeats imagines the future Coole Park after Lady Gregory's death, to which his "living feet" would never return. With its hostess gone, the place would belong to the "new faces" who merely "play tricks" (*VP* 435). However, in typical Yeatsian fashion, he immediately adopts a contrary stance and insists that even though the "new faces" occupy the "old rooms," the place ("garden") would still be infused with the spirits of its former occupants, whose presences would paradoxically be more concrete than the living: "Our shadows rove the garden gravel still, / The living seem more shadowy than they" (*VP* 435). In a way, the conclusion rejects the role of the "parting guest," as Yeats continuously initiates reengagement.

The next two poems that follow reinforce an important feature of *The Tower*: a reorientation towards present vital matters and a strengthened emphasis on the human condition. If the preceding three poems engage in more generalized meditation on time as understood in the human condition of life and death, "A Prayer for My Son" and "Two Songs from a Play" contemplate on the divine and the mythological as a way to comment, once again, on the human condition. "A Prayer for My Son" counterpoints the birth of Michael Yeats with the birth of Christ, but concludes with "human love," prioritizing the human, the "flesh and bone," over the mythic and divine. "Two Songs from a Play," originally consisting of the opening and closing lyrics from Yeats's play *The Resurrection*, was added a fourth stanza in 1931, when Yeats made yet another revision for his collected poems. Finneran argues that the fourth stanza "radically shifted" the focus "from the mythic to the human" (43), for in the original three-stanza poem, "Two Songs from a Play" clearly draws a parallel between Dionysus and Christ; however, with the fourth stanza, the two gods have become exemplars that demonstrate that "[e]verything that man esteems / Endures a moment or a day" (*VP* 438). What the original three-stanza poem stresses as the cyclical nature of history is transformed in its present four-stanza form into an explication for man's struggle to create and the inevitable evanescence, a reiteration of "[m]an is in love and loves what vanishes."

Read in this context, “Leda and the Swan,” though conceived in mythological terms, should alert us to its allusion to contemporary historical context with its appended date of 1923. Moreover, by ending in a question that centers on Leda rather than on Zeus, the poem once again emphasizes the human over the mythic. In his note, Yeats explains that the poem was occasioned by a request from “the editor of a political review [AE],” and that he had originally wanted to depict the Enlightenment thought giving way to “some movement from above preceded by some violent annunciation” (*VP* 828).⁹ Although he adds in the note that as he wrote on, “bird and lady took such possession of the scene that all politics went out of [the poem],” the immediate political relevance to Ireland and to the international situation “still retained, in its graphic, deliberate, dramatic representation of a sexual assault, a highly shocking voltage” (Brown 296). Perhaps because of this, “Leda and the Swan” has often been read through the lens of postcolonial theory. Said reads the poem as a decolonizing work which depicts “the birth of violence, or the violent birth of change,” and which expresses Yeats’s concern over how to reconcile the inevitable violence of the colonial conflict with the politics of a national struggle (284); Kiberd proposes the possibility of reading the swan as the invading English occupier and the girl as a ravished Ireland, and argues that the poem could be read “as a study of the calamitous effects of the original rape of Ireland and of the equally precipitate British withdrawal” (*Inventing Ireland* 315); Doggett believes that the poem portrays a deliberately destabilizing moment of the nation’s foundation, which works to undermine positivist historiography (110). Such readings are all plausible in their own theoretical framework, for if politics ever “went out” of the poem, it returns again with the appended date, the year in which the ceasefire of the Civil War was announced. In the present study, however, I do not advance a specifically postcolonial reading of the poem; instead, I want to highlight how its position in the volume provides clues to the poet’s imaginative journey in *The Tower*.

⁹ Originally, he had wanted to title his poem “Annunciation” (*Mm* 329).

The poem that precedes “Leda and the Swan” is a two-part poem called “Fragments,” which Yeats did not include until the 1933 version of his collected poems. This poem, which mockingly imagines Locke as the mother of a despicable mechanical cosmos, presents the “impoverished and impoverishing idea-world of empiricist philosophy and democratic politics” (P 664). “Leda and the Swan,” following it, is a metaphor for the antithetical age soon to be born, a theme already highlighted at the end of “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen,” though with less ominous suggestion. It may also be useful to remember that “Leda and the Swan” is also the introductory poem to Book Three of *A Vision* (1925), *Dove or Swan*, which applies the gyre image to explain the process of historical change and its cyclical movements (in *A Vision* (1925), the poem is titled “Leda”). Written in hybrid sonnet form (the octave rhymes according to the Shakespearean sonnet, while the sestet follows the Petrarchan sonnet) and opening with jagged diction and half lines, the poem suggests that the moment of violence engenders more violence in the future, recapitulating a familiar theme in “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen.” The ambiguity of the final lines is particularly powerful because it is asked in sure knowledge of the violence to take place in the future. Leda may or may not have taken on Zeus’s knowledge, but the question is asked all the same. For Yeats, treating the mythology as a metaphor for the present condition of Ireland, the significance of the poem lies in his renewed engagement with the Irish present, even as he knows more violence lies ahead. With this poem, he once again reengages with the Irish context, a standpoint soon to culminate in “Among School Children.”

Before the emergence of the poetic voice as poet-senator in “Among School Children,” Yeats briefly returns to the artist’s troubled identity in “On a Picture of a Black Centaur by Edmund Dulac.” The poem may seem obscure at first sight, with images of stamping centaur, green parrots, mummy wheat, and the seven Ephesian toppers occupying the space of the hexameter lines. Their eccentricity invites diverse interpretations; however, for the purpose of the study, I now focus on the image of the centaur, whose stamping hooves are described as a

“murderous thing,” and which by the end of the poem is replaced by the artist’s “unwearied gaze” (*VP* 442). Unterecker cites a passage from “Four Years: 1887-1891” in *Autobiographies*, which was written during the Anglo-Irish War, to argue for the symbolic meanings of the centaur image (189). In that particular passage, Yeats writes: “I thought that all art should be a Centaur finding in the popular lore its back and its strong legs.... One thing I did not foresee, not having the courage of my own thought: the growing murderousness of the world” (*Au* 165-166). Unterecker argues that it is possible to identify the centaur with the sort of national culture Yeats had once hoped to found, which in turn explains why its hooves have “stamped” on his works, the “murderousness of the world” corresponding to the “murdering thing” in the poem (190). Contrasted with this dark image of growing murderousness of his nation, the latter half of the poem reveals that he had found “full-flavoured wine,” which Unterecker identifies as Yeats’s Vision system (190) and Bloom identifies as “an historically-grounded vision” (367), and that he is now most fitting to “keep a watch” and keep “unwearied eyes” upon the “horrible green birds” that represent nightmarish images. In a way, the first half of the poem looks backward to the violent, uncontrollable, and brutal murderousness that the poet has relived in the war poems, but the second half of the poem is significant in finally presenting the possibility of the role of the national artist to work in the historical context. Again, as in the context of the volume, Doggett very astutely equates the “unwearied eyes” as the artist’s vigilant watch over history unfolding: “[t]he poet does not merely sing of what is ‘past, or passing, or to come,’ but turns his critical and artistic glance upon the canvas of history unfolding, aware of the need to examine history anew, wary of returning violence, and alive to the possibilities of alternative futures” (113).

The Ideal Image: “Among School Children”

“Among School Children” arguably occupies a central place in *The Tower*. In this

eight-part *ottava rima* poem, Yeats emerges as the Irish Free State senator, “A sixty-year-old smiling public man,” as he “walk[s] through the long schoolroom questioning” (VP 443), in a Montessori school staffed by nuns. There is particular significance in the specific reference to the role he now plays. It might be useful to pause here and review the roles he has projected himself into up to this point. The poet begins the volume by introducing a crisis implicated in old age in “Sailing to Byzantium,” in which he imagines a willed departure from “that” country of the young. In “The Tower,” the crisis is complicated by the danger of powerful imagination and the questioning of the appropriateness of the artist’s vocation, against which he counters with identification with the Anglo-Irish and the poet’s indomitable spirit symbolized by his tower. In “Meditations in Time of Civil War,” both the identification and the sense of being established are challenged and undermined; the crisis for the artist is further complicated by the inaction suggested by his artistic isolation. “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen” violently shatters even the position of the isolated, inactive poet, as it reveals his complicity in collective self-mockery and blindness. This turns the crisis into a self-debasing, self-obliterating tendency. “Youth and Age” recapitulates the crisis implicated in old age, as he now plays the role of the “parting guest.” However, “Leda and the Swan” gestures a reengagement with local, historical Irish context, and acknowledges the artist’s readiness to face future violence. “On a Picture of a Black Centaur by Edmund Dulac” partly restores the role of the artist, as it signals his determination to keep an eye on history unfolding. Now, we arrive in a poem where the poet-senator finally emerges, as he acknowledges his public role. How will he contemplate the crisis presented thus far?

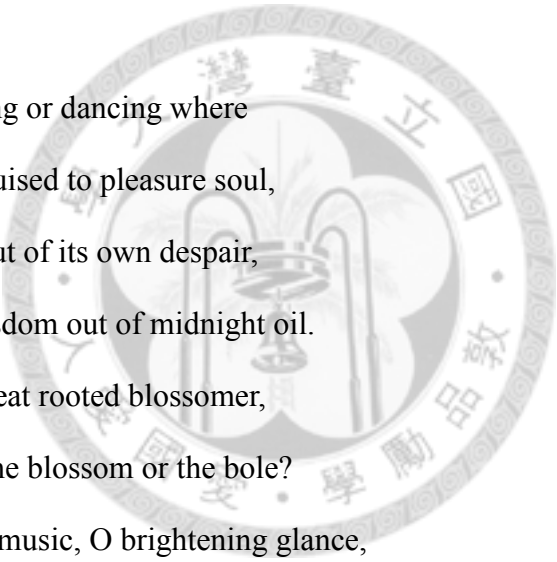
The first four stanzas recapitulate the problem of old age. The contrast between youth and age is now posited as between the “comfortable kind of old scarecrow” and the “living child” (VP 444), a contrast that leads to recollections on the personal level, taking the form of the sharp and cruel contrast between the present images of the poet and his beloved and their past images:

Her present image floats into the mind—
Did Quattrocento finger fashion it
Hollow of cheek as though it drank the wind
And took a mess of shadows for its meat?
And I though never of Ledean kind
Had pretty plumage once (*VP* 444)

This is a bitter realization of how a promising beginning comes to the end. As Vendler argues, the poem is structured on several image-diptychs, each juxtaposing an “auspicious image of inception” and a “bitter image of conclusion” (*Poets Thinking* 100). From the fifth stanza onward, the diptych of youth and age is used as the springboard to the philosophical meditation on the cost of *worshipping* images. Bodily decay is presented as inevitable, as promising youth is always undone by catastrophic age. Even the best philosophers, in their moment of intellectual genius, become in the end merely “[o]ld clothes upon old sticks to scare a bird” (*VP* 445). It is in the penultimate stanza that Yeats finally reveals the core of the problem—the worshipping of images, now addressed to as “Presences,” always leads to heartbreak. For the lover, the Presence is the idealized image of his beloved; for the mother, that of her new-born son; for the nun, that of divine personages symbolized by the marble and bronze images. These “Presences” that the speaker addresses, as if in an ode, are generated by man’s “passion, piety or affection,” created by our longing for perfection in the things we love. However, in the end, they invariably “break hearts” (*VP* 445), and they become, the poet now bitterly concludes, “self-born mockers of man’s enterprise” (*VP* 445).

This is not unfamiliar at all. As preceding poems in *The Tower* have made clear, man is too easily lost in “the labyrinth of another’s being,” too easily lost “amid the labyrinth that he has made”; he is “in love and loves what vanishes,” for “[w]hatever flames upon the night / Man’s resinous heart has fed.” The cost of worshipping images is suggested all along *The Tower*, but now it is finally openly acknowledged. The seventh part of “Among School

Children,” which reveals that man’s image-worshipping only results in heartbreak, is the only one that could not come to a full stop at the end, as if the poet, assaulted by the realization, is interrupted in the middle of the speech, unable to continue. In fact, as Vendler observes, the seventh part can also be seen as the culmination of the “unsettled” stanzas building up so far (*Poets Thinking* 99). While the first seven stanzas are all written in the “ceremonious” *ottava rima*, constant enjambment and troubled syntax disrupt the normal 6-2 division of a harmonious *ottava rima* stanza, making them all “imperfect,” a persistence that culminates in the seventh part that seems abruptly halted. However, these “imperfect” stanzas lead up, finally, to the last “perfect” stanza, which returns to the harmonious flowing of a normal *ottava rima*:



Labor is blossoming or dancing where
The body is not bruised to pleasure soul,
Nor beauty born out of its own despair,
Nor blear-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil.
O chestnut tree, great rooted blossomer,
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?
O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
How can we know the dancer from the dance? (*VP* 445-446)

Vendler observes that Yeats, in constructing each of the two concluding metaphors, the chestnut tree and the dancer, “strives to find a representation of life that does not come down to a precipitous catastrophic result from an aspiring beginning” (*Poets Thinking* 103). What these two metaphors share in common is that labor is no longer effortful and strenuous, but spontaneous and beautiful; no longer directed and mechanical, but organic and instinctive. The two metaphors can, I believe, be interpreted both on the national level and the personal level as Yeats’s new found solution to the crisis of his identity and his role and as his vision for the founding of his nation.

While “Among School Children” progresses towards personal and philosophical contemplations, it is useful to bear in mind that the poem opens with the sixty-year-old smiling public man, the Irish Free State Senator on his duty. In a way, the poem can also be read as a poem about education (*P* 667)—the nurturing of the future generation of the nation. What the concluding metaphor of the chestnut tree represents—the organic whole and effortless spontaneity—is in sharp contrast to what he learns at the beginning of the poem: that the children “learn to cipher and to sing, / To study reading-books and history, / To cut and sew, be neat in everything” (*VP* 443). The chestnut tree epitomizes a more desirable state of being as a bounteous image of an organic steady state. By being at once the leaf, the blossom, and the bole, the “great-rooted blossomer” retains its essence while keeping all its distinct parts visible. Its spontaneity suggests that it does not answer to mechanical schemes. This is for Yeats the “ideal, imagined nation, at once individual and collective”; for Yeats has by now “abandoned the desire to fashion the child and state according to a preformed design” (Doggett 116). In place of the unchanging “[m]onument of unageing intellect,” the metaphor of the chestnut tree evokes an image of a “joyous unity of being” (Vendler, *Our Secret Discipline* 284).

However, since the image of the chestnut tree is followed by that of the dancer, it should alert us to the underlying deficiency of the tree metaphor. While the tree is bounteous and may embody, in its visual unity, the ideal image of the state, its blossoming is still passive and bound by its species-nature immobility. It does not have its own free will; it just blossoms according to biological instinct, becoming an image of “involuntary organic blossoming-unto-death” (Vendler, *Poets Thinking* 104). This is hardly a perfect metaphor for the ideal state of the nation and for the individual, and this is, as critics have pointed out, why the second, and final metaphor is introduced, the solitary dancer whose “body swayed to music,” dances with a “brightening glance.” In one of the original drafts, Yeats had imagined a dancing couple instead of a solitary dancer: “O dancing couple, glance that mirrors glance /

How can we know the dancer from the dance?" (*Mm* 386-387). By substituting the couple, who needs each other to mirror glance, with an ungendered solitary dancer, Yeats had created an image that is at once self-sufficient and spontaneous. While it is true that the movement of the body (the dance) is controlled by the music ("body swayed to music"), indicating that the body must follow the fate given to it by environment and historical contingency, the music "leaves open an infinite number of expressive possibilities for self-choreography," and the "brightening glance" further suggests an ever progressive state of being (Vendler, *Our Secret Discipline* 285-286). Thus, the dancer complements the deficiency of the rooted-blossomer, and the combined image provides a vision of a community that is "ever-unfolding, eternally self-creating, and deeply-rooted in the liberating possibilities of uncertainty" (Doggett 117). The national artist determined to keep an unwearied eye on the state of the nation has found the "perfect" image to imagine its unity of being, embodied in a final "perfect" *ottava rima* stanza.

How do we understand the image of the dancer in terms of the artist's inward-guided meditation on the crisis of his role? "Among School Children," with its achieved image of the dancer, marks the key point in *The Tower* where the journey of repeated disengagement and reengagement finds a suitable metaphor. In the final resolution, reached only in the last lines of the poems, Yeats had found an adequate metaphor to counter the binary model of age versus youth. The image of the dancer stands for "the continuum of life occupying the extended space between birth and death" (Vendler, *Our Secret Discipline* 286). While the fated end as old scarecrow and lost plumage cannot be avoided, man's identity is not defined by this inevitable end, for now it is recognized that identity can be defined as "a continuum in time, constantly being altered as...lives unfold" (286). In other words, the constantly changing dance entails possibilities to be fulfilled, and the inextricability between the dancer and the dance implies that Yeats can now acknowledge the heartbreak brought by the worshipping of images without totally canceling the inventing and continuous nature of being.

This is a poet who begins the poem still troubled by the dichotomy of youth and age, who lives through the revelation of the inevitable heartbreak in man's enterprise of idealization, but who is able to construct two images that are presented as possibilities to counter and challenge that dichotomy. Two because even though the image of the chestnut tree has its own limitations, the image significantly points to the simultaneous existence of individuality and unity. We may now recall the contrast between the "imperfect" stanzas of the first seven parts and the "perfect" stanza in the last. As Vendler argues, the deliberate contrast suggests that "life is imperfect as it unfolds and yet perfect as it rounds to completion, lofty in its public, private, and collective yearnings and yet persistently, and enigmatically, disappointing until it can be re-evaluated *in extenso*" (*Poets Thinking* 100, original emphasis).

"Epilogue": "All Souls' Night"

The concluding poem of *The Tower*, "All Souls' Night," is also the epilogue to *A Vision*. Its double role can be read as both signifying the end of a journey traveled through *The Tower* and the accomplishment of an assiduous search for occult wisdom, now merged as one. The poem is written in the "labyrinthine" stanza already discussed in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," which, by resembling the shape of the gyre/vortex, is indeed most fitting for a poem in which the poet reveals that "I have mummy truths to tell / Whereat the living mock" (*VP* 474). In a fashion similar to "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory," Yeats summons up a trio of ghosts, all of whom his fellow occultists: the painter William Thomas Horton, the actress Florence Farr Emery, and MacGregor Mathers, one of the founders of the Golden Dawn and a sedulous pursuer of occult texts. As Bloom points out, "'All Souls' Night' deprecates the sober ear and the outward eye, and celebrates the dead who in their lives were drunk with vision, as Yeats chooses (here) to see himself as being" (370).

Whereas "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory" moves to a fourth ghost, that of Robert Gregory, "All Souls' Night," after summoning the trio of ghosts, returns to the living

poet. It is a significant return which highlights Yeats's positioning of himself among the dead on All Souls' Night, but which also stresses the poetic voice that remains central in a poem that suggests the contrary. With this poem, Yeats is able to imagine a state of being beyond the threshold of after-life. He would only share the "marvellous thing," the cryptic newfound wisdom with a mind that

...if the cannon sound

From every quarter of the world, can stay

Wound in mind's pondering,

As mummies in the mummy-cloth are wound (*VP* 471)

This is a mind that will remain undisturbed by the turbulence of historical realities, which will not labor for hatred, nor traffic in mockery, nor engage in futile worshipping of images. By the end of the poem, with "mummy truths to tell," Yeats now stresses the "active, shaping power of his detached glance" (Doggett 118):

Nothing can stay my glance

Until that glance run in the world's despite

To where the damned have howled away their hearts,

And where the blessed dance (*VP* 474)

At the close, deep in contemplation—"[t]ill meditation master all its parts"—he has taken on the desired composure imagined at the opening stanza:

Such thought, that in it bound

I need no other thing,

Wound in mind's wandering

As mummies in the mummy-cloth are wound. (*VP* 474)

This is the contentment reached at the end of a journey. As Heaney observes, the last stanza "represents the positive force that Yeats's tower-schooled mind could command: his prayer for concentration is itself focused and shining with an inward, self-directed illumination"

(*Place of Writing* 32). The poet, who had wished to be purged of his desire at the beginning of the journey, and who had vacillated between repeated departure and return, has, at the close of the journey, been able to view himself as an entity “wound” in itself, who no longer needs imagistic construction, mythological analogy, or any other kind of external defense. It is significant for the poem to end in a time and space both removed from the turbulent 1920s and the Irish context. The postscript of “Oxford, Autumn 1920” situates the poet in an imaginative space outside of Ireland and in a time before the founding of the Free State. The final destination arrived is not the yet-to-be-reached city of Byzantium in an ambiguous Middle Age period, but a place and time already lived and experienced. This is the end of a journey that, after repeated efforts of disengagement and reengagement with the clash of national and personal identity and crisis, finally achieves a triumphant recognition of the mind’s self-sustaining power, embodied in the equanimity of the mind’s “wandering.”

“All Souls’ Night” represents the journey’s end. As we have seen, at the beginning of the journey, Yeats had needed his tower as an outward and visible sign of his art and as an emblem of adversity; he had needed to turn to it for imaginative renewal, to find solutions for the problem of old age, and to meditate on his partly-embraced Anglo-Irish identity. The tower as his place of writing had provided him with the spirit of strength, both by its stern and ancient materiality as a physical existence and by its being imaginatively transformed into the mental space from which the poetic voice can be heard. In the process, it has also been written into the poems, gaining a second dimension, embodied in the poetic form. Therefore, it is all the more significant that at the end of “All Souls’ Night”—the end of the journey—he is able to say that he is content to be bound in his mind’s wandering alone. The mind has been wandering; however, now, the “tower-schooled mind” that has meditated on the troubled identity (as an aging artist) and the equally troubling founding moment of the nation can now sustain itself, needing no other thing. Yeats’s tower, his place of writing, has indeed given him the enabling power to reach the journey’s end.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined how Yeats transforms his tower, Thoor Ballylee, into his place of writing, from which his spiritual intellect fortified itself in the careful architectonics of verse in *The Tower*. It has demonstrated how the historical realities of the 1920s in Ireland, often characterized by recurrent violence and disorder, correspond to Yeats's troubled meditations on both his role as the national poet and on the founding moments of his native country. It has attempted to show how, equipped with the strengthened poetic voice and a readiness to doubt even his most cherished symbol of art, Yeats had been able to initiate an imaginative journey in *The Tower*, moving from the problem of old age and the self-questioning of his role, through a re-living of the throes of the nation's birth, and finally finding an ideal image for the unity of being both for himself and for his country and achieving an equanimity of mind at the journey's end. In examining the poems, I have paid close attention to the lyric form into which Yeats had cast them, reading it as a created mental space—indeed, a metaphoric place of writing—which the poet constantly occupies. By doing so, I hope to direct the focus to the work itself, since Yeats often took great pains to find and modify suitable vehicles for his poetic voice. As Heaney observes, poetic form is “both the ship and the anchor. It is at once a buoyancy and a holding, allowing for the simultaneous gratification of whatever is centrifugal and centripetal in mind and body” (*Crediting Poetry* 29). Therefore, with this study, I hope to provide new vantage points for the reexamination and appreciation of one of Yeats's finest artistic accomplishments.

However, with the inevitable limitation of space and time, I was forced to leave out discussions on several poems, for instance the ballad sequence “A Man Young and Old,” which I believe can be best understood when put in juxtaposition with “A Woman Young and Old” in the 1933 *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*. Also, as I have explained in the Introduction, my choice of the version of *The Tower* as it appears in the 1933 Macmillan

Collected Poems inevitably excludes discussion of “The Gift of Harun Al-Rashid” and thus the possibility of reading it alongside “All Souls’ Night,” for their shared theme of Yeats’s occult studies. These aspects will, I hope, prove to be fruitful as subjects for further studies on *The Tower* and on Yeats’s poetry in general. In addition, I believe a comparative study between *The Tower* and *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* will also greatly enhance our understanding of Yeats’s continuous modification and imagining of his tower symbol (for instance in “Blood and the Moon”), and of his acute sense of particular place and how it is inextricably connected to ideas of identity, aesthetics, and poetic vision (as in “Coole Park, 1929” and “Coole and Ballylee, 1931”). These are some of the immense possibilities that still lie ahead of the present study, each promising rewarding experience in fuller understanding of one of our greatest modern poets.

Having said this much, I now conclude with a passage from Heaney’s Nobel Lecture, where he was talking about Yeats’s achieved poetic form:

And it is by [the achieved poetic form] that Yeats’s work does what the necessary poetry always does, which is to touch the base of our sympathetic nature while taking in at the same time the unsympathetic reality of the world to which that nature is constantly exposed. The form of the poem, in other words, is crucial to poetry’s power to do the thing which always is and always will be to poetry’s credit: the power to persuade that vulnerable part of our consciousness of its rightness in spite of the evidence of wrongness all around it, the power to remind us that we are hunters and gatherers of values, that our very solitudes and distresses are creditable, in so far as they, too, are an earnest of our veritable human being. (*Crediting Poetry* 29)

Although Heaney was commenting specifically on poetic form, I believe his “crediting” of poetry here is in truth a most fitting summary for Yeats’s impressive achievements in *The Tower*. In the end, the steadying gift of finished art, embodied in the poetry that faces a constantly flickering horizon of uncertainty, reassures the artist as well as the reader of the

values we hold dear in our human existence. I believe this is indeed one of the greatest gifts Yeats had left us—not just the accomplished art itself, but its constant and sometimes relentless probing of enigmas to present visions of reality.



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