

Young Yeats's Social Disunity: Some Elements of Early Heroes

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

Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931.

W.B. Yeats(1865–1939) was a curious poet who had many interests and activities with little relation, at first sight between them. They were aesthetic symbolism, esoteric occultism, and earnest nationalism, and it is even hard to follow them sometimes. It is obvious that Yeats was serious in every point, as we can read some remarks in his biographical writings. Apart from whether or not he believed in them, Yeats certainly attempted to derive creative motives from them and to construct his own poetic world. What is his poetic world, then? It is the world in which the energy of conflict is best valued; in other words, it is the world in which heroes' inner energy – “passion” leading them to conflict – is best valued. Where does this worship of energy come from? It seems to have its root in Yeats's state of mind which wishes to overcome the society of the time. Therefore, the purpose of this essay is to investigate the specificity of Yeats's early heroes through casting light on the social context of the time.

I

We shall recognize that the social background of the time made a considerable impact on Yeats, when we read the recollections of his boyhood in “Four Years: 1887–1891”.

I was unlike others of my generation in one thing only. I am very religious, and deprived by Huxley and Tyndall, whom I detested, of the simple-minded religion of my childhood(A, 115-6).¹

What was the social background of the time which led him to feel alienated from his contemporaries? In the late Victorian period, when Yeats started his artistic career, there had

been occurring great upheavals in the social and spiritual life. The "feudal" and agrarian order of the past had been replaced by the scientific and industrial society. Rider Haggard, the author of *King Solomon's Mines*(1885), says in *Rural England*(1902) as follows;

The real peril both to agriculture and, what is even more important, to the Country at large lies, however, in the fact that the supply [of labour] is being cut at its source. The result of my inquiries on this point are even worse than I feared. Everywhere the young men and women are leaving the villages where they were born and flocking into the town.²

It was natural that with the advance of industrialization, the city became the basic population area and the most familiar environment, even if it might have given the dwellers unhealthy and inhuman conditions. The rate of urban population to the rural one was, in fact, seventy-seven per cent to twenty-three, according to the statistics of 1902.³ The changes in the nature of society transformed itself culturally and stylistically; that is, traditional belief and custom were much more rapidly and radically being replaced by scientism and the struggle for existence than ever before. The sense of scientism and struggle came from the Darwinian theory of "evolution" and "natural selection". Thomas H. Huxley a Darwinian, mentions as follows:

The notions of the beginning and the end of the world entertained by our forefathers are no longer credible. It is very certain that the earth is not the chief body in the material universe, and that the world is not subordinated to man's use. It is even more certain that nature is the expression of a definite order with which nothing interferes, and that the chief business of mankind is to learn that order and govern themselves accordingly. Moreover, this scientific "criticism of life" presents itself to us with different credentials from any other. It appeals not to authority, nor to what anybody may have thought or said, but to nature.⁴

The late Victorians, especially the educated people, could not help but feel that they were mere parts of the gigantic natural law: they were not the sons of the Almighty God any longer; nothing but the descendants of apes.

Moreover, adopting the law of "Natural selection" to the social universe, Herbert Spencer mentions:

The poverty of the incapable, the distresses that come upon the imprudent, the starvation of the idle, and those shoulderings aside of the weak by the strong, which leave so many "in shallows and in miseries", are the decrees of a large, far-seeing benevolence.⁵

He was strongly convinced that it was through struggle that society could recover harmony, and that struggle among people was necessary for the progress of society. People thus increasingly felt themselves coming under the dominance of an invisible energy, which meant the end of one cycle in history and the beginning of another "new" cycle. It was the con-

sciousness of “modernity”, and in some ways the artists had to begin to engage themselves in search for a new style; the embodiment of new meanings and new metaphors, new symbols and new myths which were suitable for the “modern” world.

The artists were aware that the traditional harmonies between the inner world and the outer world, between man and nature, were breaking up; they could not bring the antinomies into relation, though some of them could observe the outer world, while others could turn to the inner world of consciousness. They could not help facing up to themselves cornered by a harsh actuality. As Walter Pater states, “Every one of those impressions is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world”.⁶ They were intent on “de-mythologizing” the traditional worth which was inconsistent with their actual experiences, and on “re-mythologizing”, which was to become a solitary task.⁷ Superior artists tried to write out of their own experiences of personal culture, traditional and aesthetic values; their works became their own mythology, which was to fight with the current of the time.

II

The problem which confronted Yeats, like many other modern artists, was the uncertainty of modern culture. Yeats was strongly conscious of disunity in modern society of a crisis of tradition. He writes in 1902:

The Church when it was most powerful created an imaginative unity, for it taught learned and unlearned to climb, as it were, to the great moral realities through hierarchies of Cherubim and Seraphim, through clouds of Saints and Angels who had their precise duties and privileges.⁸

This statement suggests the barrenness in modern art which lost the traditional symbolism. To Yeats, the creative works of an ancient culture had been produced by religious inspiration and dedicated to a religious end: “in very early days the arts were so possessed by this method that they were almost inseparable from religion”(E & I,204). It was primarily because of deprivation of religious belief that modern art lost its traditional unity, Before this time, he, in his twenties, could say that Europe had shared one mind and heart “until both mind and heart began to break into fragments, a little before Shakespeare’s birth” (A,191).

Yeats’s concern for the lack of tradition, from which he thought he could gain inspiration for his work, was often expressed in his letters, newspaper articles, and essays in the eighteen nineties’, in a nostalgic and confident manner. His sympathy with such traditional and religious elements in arts comes partly from the Pre-Raphaelite atmosphere with which he had been familiar under the influence of his father, and partly from his memory of

idyllic Sligo, where he saw and heard the local wonders, the ancient mysteries of the supernatural having continued since the pagan period.⁹ In 1902 Yeats writes in “At Stratford-on-Avon”:

English literature, because it would have grown out of itself, might have had the simplicity and unity of Greek literature, for I can never get it out of my head that no man, even though he be Shakespeare, can write perfectly when his net is woven of threads that have been spun in many lands (E & I, 109)

Again, he refers to the man of ancient Greece who could have “all the subtlety of Shelley and yet no image unknown among the common people and speak no thought that was not a deduction from the common thought”(E & I,296). To Yeats, great art can be produced only in a society with cultural unity, where a symbol – common metaphor – can create a common image among people. Ancient Greece, Byzantium, Medieval Europe seemed to him to have its unity. Yeats says in “Poetry and Tradition”(1907) as follows:

Three types of men have made all beautiful things, Aristocracies have made beautiful manners, because their place in the world puts them above the fear of life, and the country men have made beautiful stories and beliefs, because they have nothing to lose and so do not fear, and the artists have made all the rest, because Providence has filled them with recklessness(E & I,251).

The expression like “unity of society” or “unity of culture”, which Yeats often uses in his essays, idealizes this feudal tradition and aristocratic tradition in society as well as the literary tradition which culminated in the works of Shakespeare. Yeats thought that tradition had been declining to the level of a mere secondary meaning for people’s life since that time.

Yeats’s earlier artistic work, thus, began by aiming to recover this social unity – literary tradition, the continuity of voice from generation to generation. In order to regain “unity” in society, he tried to establish his own personal religion. He tells

I had made a new religion, almost an infallible Church of poetic tradition, of a fardel of stories, and of personages, and of emotions, inseparable from their first expression, passed on from generation to generation by poets and painters with some help from philosophers and theologians(A,116).

Yeats found in religious belief a unity of feeling, by which people share considerable communication between two worlds: spiritual reality “seen by the mind’s eye, when exalted by inspiration”(E & I,120) and physical reality by which we can see and act in everyday life. He thought that the true task of the artist was to show the people this invisible reality. While still in the group of “fin-de-siècle” artists, Yeats in 1895 emphasized the superiority of artists seeking invisible reality to those of the natural ones.

Literature differs from explanatory and scientific writing in being wrought about a mood, or a community of moods, as the body is wrought about an invisible soul . . . Everything that can be seen, touched, measured, understood, argued ever, is to the imaginative artist nothing more than a means, for he belongs to the invi-

ble life, and delivers its ever new and ever ancient revelation(E & I,195).

Walter E. Houghton deals with some writers most concerned with this problem, and points out the idea of “hero-worship” of their time in *The Victorian Frame of Mind*(1975) as follows:

That state of mind is attributable partly to the ennui and frustration which accompanied the traditional belief, and partly to certain philosophical theories and social conditions (referred to here as “external necessity”).¹⁰

It was because of the crisis of religious belief and “external necessity” like nationalism and imperialism that the late Victorians sought the idealized human figure in the place of the lost God. There, the hero had to serve his society as if he were a savior. At least, the Victorians expected that the hero would do something good for them and their society.¹¹ However, Yeats’s hero is different from those heroes; his hero is not merely a substitute for the lost God, but must be taken as a man with a common portrait.¹² Yeats’s hero does not choose service to society, but is concerned with self-fulfilment. His sole service to society, if any can be so-called, exists in a purely private exaltation which may function as an example to others; that is, he is an archetypal hero. An “archetypal hero” is an original character from whom the artists create their own heroes in various ways. Northrop Frye defines it as follows:

In the solar cycle of the day, the seasonal cycle of the year, and the organic cycle of human life, there is a single pattern of significance, out of which myth constructs a central narrative around a figure who is partly vegetative fertility and partly a god or archetypal human being.¹³

For example, Yeats’s first epic hero, Oisín, exiles himself from troublesome actuality with his mistress, and lives a dreamy life. He incarnates people’s nostalgic wish to flee to an imaginative world, but never gives direct help to them. Yeats only expresses his own image derived from the original – the legend of Oisín. But in doing so, he tries to restore the natural wish of people. To him, the world of ancient legends is a kind of design of symbolism; in other words, a symbol for the imagination itself. The ancient hero is derived from the simple imagination of the ancient people, but Yeats describes the hero more vividly and strongly by sublimating him to a personal symbol. Surely, in those days, a fashionable study of occultism spread among the poets who could not endure the utilitarian society.¹⁴ But Yeats himself found in it an inseparable link with his artistic theme, in a sense, characteristic of the young Yeats to desire to stand apart from the visible world and live only in the imagination, just as he states this aspiration in the famous poem, “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” (1891).

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,

And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made:
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee
And live alone in the bee-loud glade(VP,117).

Aengus, the *alter ego* of Yeats, also desires the everlasting land where he can meet a beautiful girl again.

Though I am old with wandering
Through hollow lands and hilly
I will find out where she has gone,
And kiss her lips and take her hands;
And walk among long dappled grass,
And pluck till time and times are done
The silver apples of the moon,
The golden apples of the sun(VP,150).

In plays as well, a desire to delve into the ever land became an important theme of Yeats's earlier heroes, though there are some variations. Cathleen, a heroin of *The Countess Cathleen*(1892), ignoring the values of this world, sells her soul to the devils in order to help hungry peasants.

And if it be a sin, while faith's unbroken
God cannot help but pardon. There is no soul
But it's unlike all others in the world,
Nor one but lifts a strangeness to God's love
Till that's grown infinite, and therefore none
Whose loss were less than irremediable
Although it were the wickedest in the world(VP1,69–70).

In her consciousness, even the Christian doctrine is a standard of this world, and cannot lead her soul to heaven. True salvation depends upon cordial charity towards the peasants, not upon blind faith to the written law that they are bound to obey. But the hungry peasants are neither satisfied with the food given by her sacrifice nor understand her charity towards them: That is, Cathleen never serves their will. Mary in *The Land of Heart's Desire*(1894), abhorring the monotonous peasant life, wishes the fairies to take her into the fairy land, "where beauty has no ebb, decay no flood"(VP1,205). To her, the world and her house are nothing but "dull" places, in which her families' tongues have deprived her of "freedom" of mind.

Come, faeries, take me out of this dull house!
Let me have all the freedom I have lost;
Work when I will and idle when I will!
Faeries, come take me out of this dull world,
For I would ride with you upon the wind,
And dance upon the mountains like a flame(VP1,192).

Her action is, therefore, an escape from her surroundings into the land of the fairies, but in a poetical level it means a wish for an imaginative world which sets her soul free, and permits her to accomplish whatever she dreams. Another example, Michael in *Cathleen*

ni Houlihan(1902), who is involved in a wedding, is interrupted by a supernatural intrusion – an old woman representing the queenly spirit of Ireland and chooses an heroic death for Cathleen; a heroic death by which Michael will “be remembered for ever . . . alive for ever”(VP1,229). Though the setting is concerned with Irish nationalism, what Yeats intends here is the same theme as with Mary’s story – a longing for an ever land. From the point of view of everyday level, both Michael and Mary choose death before life, but ironically death leads them to everlasting life.

These conflicts between two sets of value are thus reflected in Yeats’s early works in various manners. In the conflicts, the heroes can obtain their “identity”: for example, at the moment of conflict, they find their own ideal selves in the world of passion and aspiration – “the supernatural”; and not in the world of human affairs – “the natural”. It is, therefore, not at all surprising for us to find Yeats’s deep interest in esoteric symbolism. His definition of “magic” suggests clearly his opinion about the relation between inner reality and his sense of tradition.¹⁴ Yeats created his own poetic universe for ideal heroes by combining folk imagination and the artist’s imagination in order to recover the “unity” which he thought had been lost for a long time.

III

However, a religious and supernatural element is not the only characteristic of Yeats’s early hero. It should be noted here that there is another phase of the heroic attitude which can be traced in the early works and which becomes a distinguishing quality of much of his greatest heroic figures later on. It is the sense of aristocratic sublimity which was lost with the decline of “feudality”. David Daiches picks up some instances of the word “high” representing heroic sublimity.¹⁵ Yeats uses it many times when he refers to Maud Gonne whom he regards as the prototype of Helen of Troy, “the highest beauty”. In “Adam’s Curse”(1902), writing of her, he uses this word:

I had a thought for no one’s but your ears:
That you were beautiful, and that I strove
To love you in the old *high* way of love(VP,206). [Italics mine]

The line shows us that “high” is the adjective of heroic attitude and has a hierarchical meaning.¹⁶ When he was conscious of the turning of the historical cycle, Yeats was strongly dissatisfied that aristocratic courtesy was replaced by the snobbishness of the middle class. He abhorred them because they had nothing of the heroic manners and aristocratic taste: “The others, being anxious, have come to possess little that is good in itself, and are always changing from thing to thing, for whatever they do or have must be a means to something

else . . .”(E & 1,251). Yeats’s admiration for “high” aristocratic tradition seems to be based on a way of life which converts the chaos of society to an orderly arrangement through custom and ceremony, and the ritual of courtesy. Yeats compares this action to that of the artist himself.

In life courtesy and self-possession, and in the arts style, are the sensible impressions of the free mind, for both arise out of a deliberate shaping of all things, and from never being swept away, whatever the emotion, into confusion or dullness. (E & 1,253).

Courtesy is perfectly coincident with both manhood and heroic passion. To him, the “highest life unites as in one fire, the greatest passion and the greatest courtesy”.¹⁷ And “the worth of man’s acts in the moral memory, a continual height of mind in the doing of them, seemed more to him than their immediate result . . .”(E & I,247). To turn once more to *The Countess Cathleen*, we can find in Cathleen’s action this idea of courtesy: the actuality with which Cathleen is fighting is not only morality – the selling of her soul, but also middle class snobishness. The devils who buy her soul are disguising themselves as merchants, whom Yeats regards as representative of middle class snobbishness. Cathleen exercises the highest heroic action with aristocratic dignity. The “high and solitary and most stern” action was thus an expression of an ideal hero. This kind of aristocratic courtesy was what Yeats was later to associate with the life of the traditional “Big House”.¹⁸

Lady Gregory, Yeats’s patroness and dramatist, also represented for him the elements of traditional aristocracy in modern Ireland. In her Yeats saw and admired the “sense of feudal responsibilities, not of beauty as the word is generally understood, but of burdens laid upon her by her status and her character, a choice constantly renewed in solitude” (A,395). Even if the modern Irish aristocracy is powerless, it seems to him to maintain the virtues of the old days with which it really ruled the land; the successors seem to have a sense of feudal responsibility, of an intellectual life, and even of a kind of physical perfection. In his poem, “In Memory of Major Robert Gregory”(1918), Yeats describes Major Gregory as a sort of Sir Philip Sidney, a perfect Renaissance man; “Soldier, scholar, horseman”(VP,327). Yeats pictures him not so much as an actual portrait of the son of his intimate friend but rather as his ideal or perfect man, because his life as well as his death is symbolic of the heroic life.

Nor law, nor duty bade me fight,
Nor public men, nor cheering crowds,
A lonely impulse of delight
Drove to this tumult in the clouds;
I balanced all, brought all to mind,
The years to come seemed waste of breath,
A waste of breath the years behind
In balance with this life, this death(VP,328).

Lady Gregory also could display an equally heroic calm as that of her son when she was faced with the ultimate tragedy in her life – her son’s sudden death.

She goes about her house erect and calm
Between the pantry and the linen-chest,
Or else at meadow or at gazing overlooks
Her labouring men, as though her darling lived,
But for her grandson now; there is no change
But such as I have seen upon her face
Watching our shepherd sports at harvest-time
When her son’s turn was over(VP,340).

Yeats thus continued to think about their aristocratic life and heroic “death”, “Until imagination brought/ A fitter welcome; but a thought/ Of that late death took all my heart for speech”(VP,328); until their heroic deed becomes his own experience in his mind.

IV

Though Yeats had already formulated his idea of the heroic personality by the end of the last century, his reading of Nietzsche in 1902 gave him another highly important outlook on his heroic theory.¹⁹ What inspired him is Nietzsche’s theory of the superman, with a heroic stature which has little to do with the social view of the hero. The will to “power”, Nietzsche says, “can manifest itself only in resistances; therefore, it seeks that which resists it”. Moreover, “it is not the satisfaction of the will that causes pleasure . . . but rather the will’s forward thrust and again becoming master over that which stands in its way”.²⁰ The hero must have power to overcome himself, and energy and will to attain this power, and his sense of life must be dynamic and dramatic. Yeats soon came to sympathize with the philosophy of power, and dramatized it in *The King’s Threshold*(1904), in which Seanchan, facing his death, says:

And I would have all know that when all falls
In ruin, poetry call out in joy,
Being the scattering hand, the bursting pod,
The victim’s joy among the holy blame,
God’s laughter at the shattering of the world(VP1,266–67).

The attitude of Seanchan directly comes from Nietzsche: there is described the simultaneous presence of joy, triumph, death, and heroic laughter in the face of death. Nietzsche says, “What makes heroic? – To go to meet simultaneously one’s greatest sorrow and one’s greatest hope”.²¹ The word “joy” seems at times to be too contradictory as a tragic emotion – the emotion of the moment of death, but Yeats regards the tragic ecstasy as that “which is the best that art – perhaps – can give”(E & I,239). “Ecstasy” is to him “some

fulfilment of the soul in itself, some slow or sudden expansion of obstacles, which knows triumph”(A,471). The hero, at the moment of his death, falls in the state of “ecstasy” with “joy”. Yeats writes a letter to his father that “Ecstasy includes emotions like those of Synge’s Deirdre after her lover’s death which are the worst of sorrows to the ego . . .” (L,587). If we quote the passage of Synge’s *Deirdre of the Sorrows*(1908), we will understand the meaning of it.

It was sorrows foretold, but great joy were my share always . . . It’s a pitiful things, Conchubor, you have done this night in Emain, yet a thing will be a joy and triumph to the ends of life and time.²²

This state of mind is surely in the mind of Yeats’s earlier heroes, too, but his heroic theory began to define itself more sharply in his enthusiastic reading of Nietzsche.

The counterpart of Nietzsche’s hero is perhaps Cuchulain in *On Baile’s Strand*(1904). The myth of Cuchulain, with its powerful epic element, had a multiple symbolic value for Yeats since it contains “an immense variety of incident and character, and of ways of expressing emotion”.²³ He found in Cuchulain the pure “will” to overcome himself as well as “passion” which he thought was one of the essential elements in heroic tragedy. As he states, “Passion, because most living, are most holy . . . and man shall enter eternity borne upon their wings”(E & I,112–3), and “passion and not thought makes tragedy”(VP1,761). It is a primordial feeling, surging from the memory of the ancient soil,²⁴ and a high emotion committing itself to the ideals of the hero himself. In the work, Cuchulain has conquered and loved Queen Aoife, but he does not know that she has borne him a son. He rebels against the High King, Conchubor, refusing to take the oath of loyalty to him, but in vain. The oath forces him to fight with and kill his own son, though he becomes vaguely aware of this fact. Learning that he murdered his own son, Cuchulain dashes out to fight the sea, and dies in the waves at last.

‘T was they that did it, the pale windy people.
Where? Where? Where? My sword against the thunder!(VP1,522)

The enemy that Cuchulain is fighting is, in fact, neither Conchubor nor the waves, but the intangible and unpredictable; the very source of life and passion – the self. The restoration of the self is an action of heroism, for in his death Cuchulain obtains heroic and mythic status by the terrible ordeal of his grief and rage. At the climax, the hero represents the energy of his being in an exaggerated gesture of fighting the waves. The gesture is masculinity only as an expression of the archetypal hero’s passionate nature. Thomas Parkinson characterizes Cuchulain’s last action as “a symbol of a universal mood; his single-minded devotion to his guiding passion results in an act of sublime simplicity, expressive of his lack of concern for the limitations of life, ruinous to his temporal existence, evocative

of terror and admiration”.²⁵ Yeats attempts to create heroic images that enable man, in his struggle with the self, to live with the idea that “life is a perpetual injustice”(M,254), and to present the modern situation as tragedy through Cuchulain’s action; tragic life is the source of all souls; as Yeats states “we begin to live when we have received life as tragedy” (A,189). It is evident that Yeats, who thought of his life as a tragedy, chose Cuchulain as his own personal ideal because of his active joy: he writes in the performance of the play, “‘Cuchulain’ seemed to me a heroic figure because he was creative joy separated from fear” (L,913). Like Cuchulain who, fighting the waves with a sword, penetrates beyond joy into the ecstasy of release he himself creates, Yeats tries to live courageously his tragic life – his early life was truly filled with unsatisfied events, the remarkable one having been frustration of love with Gonne. In fighting such a harsh actuality with an aristocratic spirit, Yeats struggled to formulate heroic unity in which he could experience the joy of release from the barren actuality.

In 1937, two years before his death, Yeats states as follows:

A poet writes always of his personal life, in his finest work out of its tragedy, whatever it be, remorse,lost love, or mere loneliness; he never speaks directly as to someone at the breakfast table, there is always a phantasmagoria(E & I,509).

It is evidently the same theme that Yeats was dealing with in all of his works, although he seemed to change his style as well as his view point as most critics, though not all, have pointed out.²⁶ With fantastic interests in legendary heroes in his youth, Yeats, in fact, concentrated on the heroes’ conflicts in an oppressive situation. He also stared at the reactions of men actually facing their death – their “heroic” figures at the moment of death. Moreover, from them Yeats deduced the “heroic” way of life in tragic situations.

Notes:

1 In giving references I use the following abbreviations:

- A W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, (London: Macmillan, 1955).
E & I -----, *Essays and Introductions*, (London: Macmillan, 1961).
L -----, *The Letters of W.B. Yeats*, (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954).
M -----, *Mythologies*, (London: Macmillan, 1957).
VP -----, *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats*, (London: Macmillan, 1957).
VP1 -----, *The Variorum Edition of the Plays of W.B. Yeats*, (London: Macmillan, 1966).

2 Rider Haggard, *Rural England in Into Unknown England* edited by Peter Keating, (Glasgow: Collins, 1976) p.216.

3 Ibid., p.198.

4 Thomas Henry Huxley, *Science and Culture in Prose of the Victorian Period* edited by William E. Buckler, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1958) p.532.

5 Herbert Spencer, *Social Statics* quoted by Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957) p.209.

6 Walter Pater, *The Renaissance*, (1873; rpt., Glasgow: Collins, 1957) p.220.

7 Mircea Eliade's statement in *Myth, Dreams, and Mysteries*, (1957) will define the two words; "de-mythologize" and "re-mythologize".

All poetry is an effort to *re-create* the language; in other words, to abolish current language, that of everyday, and to invent a new, private and personal speech, in the last analysis *secret*. But poetic creation, like linguistic creation, implies the abolishment of time – of the history concentrated in language – and tends towards the recovery of the paradisiac, primordial situation; of the days when one could *create spontaneously*, when the *past* did not exist because there was no consciousness of time, no memory of temporal duration. It is said, moreover, in our own days, that for a great poet the past does not exist: the poet discovers the world as though he were present at the cosmogonic moment, contemporaneous with the first day of the Creation. From a certain point of view, we may say that every great poet is *re-making* the world, for he is trying to see it as if there were no Time, no History. In this his attitude is strangely life that of the "primitive", of the man in traditional society (Mircea Eliade, *Myth, Dreams, and Mysteries*, translated by Philip Mairet, New York: Harper and Row, (1957) pp., 35–36.

8 Introduction to *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* by Lady Augusta Gregory, (1902; rpt., London: Colin Smythe, 1973) pp.12–13.

9 Yeats had so many interests during the eighteen eighties' that it is not easy for us to schematize his artistic tendency in detail. But his art was mainly in two directions; one was Pre-Raphaelite aestheticism and the other was belief in nationality. In his youth, Yeats's career was pursued both in London and in Dublin – as the poet of *fin de siècle* and of Irish Literary Society. His interest was, however, in another place apart from these two

movements, just as he was wasting his poetic gift on Irish literary politics to his London literary friends' eyes, and in Dublin his view of life was considered too remote and delicate for national struggle (cf., W.B. Yeats, *Uncollected Prose*, vol. I, p. 247). Yeats directed his artistic theory along universal line; he states in *Ireland and Arts* (1903), "I would have Ireland re-create the ancient arts, the arts as they were understood in Judea, in India, in Scandinavia, in Greece and Rome, in every ancient land; as they were understood when they moved a whole people . . . (E & I, 206).

¹⁰ Walter E. Houghton, op. cit., p. 333.

¹¹ For instance, Houghton points out a few of real men regarded as the Victorian typical hero as follows:

. . . in English eyes Nelson and Wellington were the heroes of the age. Nelson's achievement, Carlyle had written . . ., "raised the admiration of his countrymen to enthusiasm" and made his name synonymous with "that of a Hero" . . . and his [Wellington's] explicit illustration of the principle emphasized by Carlyle that the great man was a genius capable of being either a soldier or a statesman, was the greatest single argument for Victorian hero worship (Ibid., p. 309).

¹² Alex Zwerdling, *Yeats and the Heroic Ideal*, (New York: New York University Press, 1965) p. 12.

¹³ Northrop Frye, *The Archetypes of Literature in Myth and Literature* edited by John B. Vickery, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966) p. 94.

¹⁴ John Wain, *Poetry in The Twentieth Century Mind* edited by C. B. Cox and A. E. Dyson, (London: Oxford University Press, 1972) pp. 366–367.

¹⁵ David Daiches, *The Earlier Poems: Some Themes and Patterns in In Excited Reverie: A Centenary Tribute* edited by A. Norman Jeffares and K. G. W. Cross, (London: Macmillan, 1965) p. 60.

¹⁶ Yeats's admiration of "high" status in hierarchy comes from his nostalgic looking back to the epic world in which heroes were natural leaders of society in all significant parts. However, Yeats gradually came to take it historically after reading of Castiglione's *The Courtiers* in 1907. The Renaissance thus became his ideal age, and the courtesy of the courtiers got to be an indispensable condition of heroic life in his own time. Yeats states later in *On the Boiler* (1939):

Our present civilization began about the first Crusade, reached its midpoint in the Italian Renaissance; just when that point was passing Castiglione recorded in his "Courtier" what was said in the court of Urbino somewhere about the first decade of the sixteenth century. These admirable life has gone, and what a man must do is to retain unity of being, mother-wit expressed in its perfection (*Explorations*, London: Macmillan, 1962) p. 431.

¹⁷ W. B. Yeats (ed.), *Samhain*, 1904, p. 23, edited by B. C. Bloomfield, *Samhain*, (1901–8; rpt., London, Frank Cass, 1970).

¹⁸ "Big House" represents a mansion house of the Anglo-Irish landlord who came from Britain in the Cromwellian age and after. As Daniel Corkery, in his *The Hidden Ireland*

(1924), states, "In no European country, however, Russia, perhaps, excepted, can such houses have been so entirely the heart of the district as in Ireland (Daniel Corkery, *The Hidden Ireland*, 1924; rpt., Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1975, pp.44–5.), it is the center of a kind of a kingdom.

¹⁹ For a few months he must have spent virtually in nothing but Nietzsche's works. Yeats wrote to Lady Gregory, "I have read him so much that I have made my eyes bad again . . . Nietzsche completes Blake and has the same roots – I have not read with so much excitement since I got to love Morris's stories which have the same curious astringent joy"(L,379). Yeats's numerous underlines and marginal notations in the books testify to the seriousness of his interest and the care with which he read it, as A. Zwerdling points out in his *Yeats and the Heroic Ideal*(op. cit., p.20). He soon recognized a shift occurring in society and in his own mind in the letter to A.E., "the close of the last century was full of a strange desire to get out of form, to get to some kind of disembodied beauty, and now it seems to me the contrary impulse has come. I fell about me and in me an impulse to create form, to carry the realization of beauty as far as possible"(L, 402). This statement suggests Yeats's consciousness of the opposite movements in his mind, and this antinomial movements lies clearly under his heroic figure.

²⁰ Friedrich N.Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, quoted by Denis Donoghue, (Glasgow: Collins, 1971) p.55.

²¹ F.N.Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, selected and translated by R.J.Hollingdale, *A Nietzsche Reader*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977) p.235.

²² J.M.Synge, *Collected Works*, vol. IV, edited by Ann Saddlemyer, (London: Oxford University Press, 1968) p.269.

²³ W.B.Yeats, Introduction to *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*, op. cit., p.17.

²⁴ Yeats remarks in *The Celtic Element in Literature*(1902),

All folk literature has indeed a passion whose life is not in modern literature and music and art, except where it has come by some straight or crooked way out of ancient times(E & I,179).

It is obvious that Yeats thought "passion" depends upon an undefined commitment to something beyond the self. It is common with Yeats's theory of archetypal hero.

²⁵ Thomas Parkinson, *W.B. Yeats, The Self-Critic*,(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971) pp.83–4.

²⁶ It now seems clear that Yeats changed his poetic form from the twentieth century since Edmund Wilson discussed in *Axcel's Castle*(1931): "In the frustration of early love, apparently, he has paid the price of escaping to fairyland, and the memory of it is bitter: he still champions, he still puts above everything, the nobility and splendor of the imagination; but he must face life's hard conditions"(Edmund Wilson, *Axcel's Castle*, 1931; rpt., New York, Scribner, 1969, pp.34–5). However, Yeats's poetic objects and materials never seemed to change. It is his attitude towards them that transformed itself.