

The Tower as a political poem

"Re-reading The Tower", Yeats wrote to his daughter
Pearse, "I was astonished at its bitterness, yet
its bitterness gave the book its ~~own~~ power and it
is the ~~best~~ ^{best} book I have written." Before he published
the Tower he had read it for publication, as
Walter Young and old and he looked forward, as
he told Lady Gregory, to the poems which would
answer, the political pessimism of the Tower.

"Here I shall put off the bitterness of the Irish people
quarrels and write my most amiable verses")
^{ironically} Ironically, the bitter Tower poems were composed
during the years in which Yeats met his greatest
success. Yeats was settled as man of family and
established poetic reputation. The purchase of "The Tower"
Belaglee, near Coolpark brought him in touch
with the landed aristocrat and gave him a status
he had become a Nobel Laureate and a senator of
the Irish Free State.

Yeats himself had admitted that there was an excess
of bitterness in these poems, for which there were no
obvious causes - his illness, which in 1927 brought
him to the brink of death; and the terror of the
British forces of repression, the Black and Tans,
as well as of the Irish civil war, which were posing
a real threat to all the artistic and aristocratic
values which he prized dearly. He deliberately
planned the following collection as a counterpart to
the Tower and its inherent gloom.

Almost everything in The Tower is assembled in
support of the great opening poem, "Sailing to
Byzantium? Restlessness of its theme, evidence

Restlessness cuts

Hannan - the hero of a Celtic twilight
Hannan. Hannan

supporting his contention that the modern world "is no country for old men"; the angry poems that follow catalogue incidents from the Irish "troubles" to show the violence from which Yeats sails, the terrible world that was being brought into existence by the powerful historical forces ^{he} had desired in "The Second Coming". Talking about the Irish like Yeats says, "we were to forge in Ireland a new sword on our old traditional anvil for the great battle that must in the end reestablish the old, confident joyous world." With remarks reminiscent like this, it is not surprising that the tone of Yeats's dealings with the "filthy modern tide" has little common with the mordant commentaries of Eliot and Pound.

And in all of Yeats's mature poems, it is not true - in an exact sense - that one immediately notices:

"What shall I do with this absurdity -

O heart, O troubled heart - this caricature,

Recipit age has been tied to me

As to a dog's tail?

Yeats's Byzantium is an emphatic reminder of his keen interest in that historic city of Eastern Empire and the significance of Yeats attached to its art and culture, yet behind the physical Byzantium is the present symbolical city of the unity of Being.

In the title poem the Tower Yeats further explores the dilemma of the old age. As the ghoulish company is mass assembled in poet's rooms when it is they, also, like him, were secretly angry at their old age. After talking about the old leader Hannan and, the situation gets more personal, because it reminds Yeats of his relations to Maude Gonne and his own

wife. The ghost seems to favour the woman loved and
the poet comments, as usual with the flame for man,
less than dies with the lover himself who through
pride or covardice or some subtle scruple or
conscience, failed to cross the Rubicon, but the mem-
ory of the loss suddenly blotted out all the light of his
world when he received the ^{impulsion} cryptic message in
hand some had married M^r B. in Paris
an actually fact was 'the sun's ^{under} eclipse and the
day blotted out.'

The third part is the kernel of the poem where he
talks about men like Burke and Grattan. The
people will inherit his pride, the pride of the
great men of ^{the} golden age.

"It is time now I wrote my will;

I choose upstanding men

I mock ~~Platonists~~ the Platonists? thought

and cry in Plato's teeth,

Death and love were not

Fill man made up the whole

made, love, sorrow and kernel

out of his bitter soul.

About the tower ^{he} said, "I like to think of
my building as a permanent symbol of my
work plainly visible to the passer-by," he
told T. Sturge Moore. "As you know, all my
art theories depend upon just this - rooting of
mythology in the earth." "Meditations in Time of
Civil War", is in spite of the fact that its subject
is uprooting part of the rooting process. It is one of
~~the~~ the memorable poems occasioned by the trouble
times of civil war (which forced a great dedication
Forest to all the noble houses including the

Tower itself which was, at times, very close to the
degradations of the 'distinctive forces'

Self-mocking, visionary exaltation, contemporaneous
defiance, elegy - Yeats's consistently public tone
accommodates an extraordinary range of feeling. The
poem expresses opens with a reference to the ancient

real houses of the noble families, which are on
the verge of destruction with all the values they

represent "like overflows without ambitions paid"
The bitter experiences of the "tower remnant," bitter

and violent men, might seem in the tower Stone,
the sweetness will all longed for night and day.

"The Road at my Door" and "The
Starling Nest by my Window" move us into a set

of incidents' drawn from the civil war which Yeats
expands into evidence of the larger disintegration

of Western society. The Republican Army irregulars
and the National Army lieutenant are both intruders,

from a world of action

"we are closed in, and the key is turned on our
uncertainty."

There is gross rebellion in the state - a modern situation
that Yeats is calculating at. Yeats turns his back

towards the tower and the "old snows" of the
poets' dream. But in times of war, the tower offers

no sanctuary from reality. The tower's wall-like
the world about it - looses before a chaos.

"Nineteen hundred and Nineteen" is an
effort to justify the isolation he has accepted at the

end of "Meditations in the Forest Time of Civil War"
The poet is disillusioned because he thinks that after

the war, "worse rogues and rascals had died
me." Now that time is gone. Now who had thought

"all seeds were sown" discover to their amusement
that they are "but weasels fighting in a hole."
was had ended by the time, there was a deliberate
reprimand on England's part for the nationalistic
had gained strength. Atrocities, Yeats observes, were
on both sides in order of the day.

The romantic nostalgia persists: "Man is in love
and loves what vanishes" on the first section of the
Musical Fables and Ninety-nine notes all these:
the poet, the wine, the good, and turns at last upon
itself to mock mockery, as Blake would Voltaire
and Rousseau.

The Irish dream was a moving force in the develop-
ment of Yeats's modern poetry. But the dream of his
early manhood, that a modern nation can return
to unity of culture, is false because "nowadays days
are dragon-headed."