

The Ineffaceable Border in Yeats's "Meditations in Time of Civil War"

Ryuji Ishikawa

The whole sequence of "Meditations in Time of Civil War" is composed of seven semi-independent poems each of which forms an individual "meditation." As the main title indicates, this sequence is apparently associated with the Irish Civil War which was fought in 1922-23. Not to mention the detailed information of the war, however, there are scarcely any explicit references to it except a few descriptions of soldiers. Therefore it seems that the speaker of this sequence of poems deliberately turns his eyes away from the real state of the warring affair.

Such attitude of the speaker, the poet W. B. Yeats, is closely related to his own standpoint concerning the war. He did not welcome the bloodshed in the fighting. The miserable condition of his own country inevitably obliges him to "meditate" upon his role as a nationalist poet who should embody the cultural identity of Ireland in the form of poetry. Raymond Cowell writes about the poem as follows :

Although in a sense a political poem, therefore, its political content is subordinate to Yeats's exploration of the nature of the poet's role in violent times, . . . (80)

As Cowell points out, the major interest of Yeats in this poem is not the war

itself but more personal problem derived from it. Therefore the poem does not contain so many pictures of the war. The poem is rather the place of examining his role as a nationalist poet through the war than that of expressing his political statements about the affair. This essay aims to investigate how his exploration of his identity as a nationalist poet is carried out and what result it brings about in "Meditations in Time of Civil War."

There is no doubt that Yeats is a nationalist poet in the sense that his literary activities are filled with his patriotism toward his homeland. At the same time he cannot be called a nationalist poet in the sense that his ideal nationalism could not effectively appeal to the whole Irish people. Thus his nationalism holds double aspects which could never be reconciled. This is because his nationalism was too idealistic to be put into practice in the current condition of Ireland of his time. Therefore his ardent love for his homeland paradoxically prevented the poet from identifying himself as a nationalist poet. In "Meditations in Time of Civil War," such unsettled condition of the poet is expressed in his peculiar rhetoric.

I

The role of a nationalist poet as Yeats assumed was firmly related to the current condition of his homeland. And as mentioned before, its unstable state during the Civil War forced him to reconsider his role which he had originally imagined and expected. And his original and primal concept of the nationalist poet was profoundly connected with his concept of the national identity of the Irish people which must be, he thought, the essential ground for their independence from England. Therefore it should be important to examine how Yeats's concept of the Irish identity comes out in "Meditations in Time of Civil War."

Yeats's concept of the national identity of the Irish people can be called, in a simple term, "cultural nationalism." He found in the culture of Ireland the central ground with which all the Irish nation should be identified. And by the word "culture," he means the life in the age of the Celts which is identical with that of Gael. The age goes back far beyond the Irish Ascendancy of the Anglo-Irish Protestants and even the life of Catholics which preceded the Ascendancy. In the life of such an ancient time he sees the origin of the identity of his nation.

As the antiquity of the culture which Yeats employed indicates, such life was no longer the main current in Ireland at his time. Therefore it is natural that Yeats's cultural nationalism should be regarded as a revival of the ancient culture which had already been desolate. But he thought that the ancient culture should form the very essential foundation of the life of current Irish people. And the role of the nationalist poet is, as he assumed, to embody that essential culture by reconstructing it in the form of literature and to expatriate on it to all the people in Ireland so that the spirit of the ancient life might deeply permeate into their hearts and, as a result, they could be firmly united with each other on the basis of that spirit.

Such cultural nationalism of his has two peculiar aspects. One is the aristocratic idealism which is often called "elitism." And the other is his hatred of brutality. The former is indispensable for his cultural nationalism. This is because the spirit of ancient life which he required could scarcely be seen in the majority of Irish people. Therefore it was necessary that a handful of learned people should preserve the spirit. As for the latter, it is concluded that his nationalism is primarily so "intellectual" that it could not admit any military actions.

Yeats perceived the faculty of preserving the spirit of ancient Gael in the intellectual tradition of the Protestant Ascendancy from which he himself was descended. As Donald T. Torchiana points out, the "mounting thrust

of shining talent, intelligence, and power” in the “abundant, leisured life” of the Ascendancy is depicted in the figure of the leaping fountain in the first stanza of “Ancestral Houses” (Torchiana 311) :

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 wills
 And never stoop to a mechanical
 Or servile shape, at others' beck and call.
 (lines 1-8, *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* 200)

Yeats thought that he himself belongs to the same intellectual tradition of the Protestant Ascendancy. But the fact that he stressed much importance upon the Ascendancy does not mean that he had respect for its religious side. He felt himself identified with the tradition mostly in its intellectual side. And he was certain that only its aristocratic intellectualism could appropriately revive the ancient culture of the Celts in the form of literature. In “To Ireland in the Coming Times,” which is the last poem in the collection *The Rose* (*The Collected Poems* 27-51), he declares that he is no less a nationalist poet than Thomas Davis (1814-45), James Clarence Mangan (1803-49) and Sir Samuel Ferguson all of whom belonged to the minority Protestants in Ireland.

Unfortunately Yeats's cultural nationalism was a partial idealism. Although he did not intend to do so, his nationalism, in effect, discriminated the majority of the Irish people, that is, the Roman Catholics. Whether in respect of its intellectual side or of its religious one, his excessive estimation for the Ascendancy ignored the Catholics or at least attached little impor-

tance to them. To neglect the majority of the population is almost identical with overlooking the actual condition of the current Ireland. As Alasdair D. Macrae remarks, Yeats and other nationalist poets could "ignore the Roman Catholic emphasis in the life of the huge majority of the Irish people for a thousand years," but, as a result, their vision of the nation-yet-to-be excluded the actual history of Ireland (68).

Yeats's nationalism, therefore, inevitably became an ineffective ideology. Because of its aristocratic idealism, it no longer had any operative appeal to the majority of the nation. In this sense, it may be wrong to say that the ideal vision of the nationalist poets ignored the Roman Catholics. The fact is that the unappealing idealism of them was so inconsistent with the actual condition of Ireland that the former was consequently abandoned by the latter.

Moreover Yeats's cultural nationalism has another defect which prevents itself from becoming an efficient political device. The defect is considerably associated with its "totalitarian" aspect to which Yeats has often been related. There is no doubt that his cultural nationalism has an aspect which is similar to Fascist movements in Germany and Italy in the sense that it aims at the amplification of the idealism of a few elites into the whole nation. But the defect of his cultural nationalism, which shall be discussed here, does not reside in the totalitarian element of his thought itself but rather in its deficiency as a totalitarian politics.

By comparing it with fascism, Macrae says about Yeats's totalitarian element as follows :

In the 1930s and, remembering his often expressed dislike of democratic consensus and his brief association with O'Duffy's Fascist Blueshirts in 1933, it has been easy to brand Yeats as a fascist. The label is accurate enough if it means a believer in rule of the many by the enlightened few ;

it is not accurate if the brutalities and racial discriminations of Nazism are made synonymous with fascism. (79)

It is apparent that what Macrae calls the “rule of the many by the enlightened few” is identical with Yeats’s inclination to the intellectualism of the Ascendancy. But his totalitarian politics lacked the latter of the fascist aspects which Macrae points out.

If it could be allowed to say that its very “blutarities” and “racial discrimination” enabled Nazism to be actualized in human history, Yeats’s cultural nationalism could not be realized because of its lack of either of them. Therefore his nationalism became an inefficient idealism.

It is true that his ideal nationalism consequently ignored the Roman Catholics. But he never intended to exclude them from the country-to-be-born. When he says, “The Irish race would have become a chosen race, one of the pillars that uphold the world,” “the Irish race” designates all the nation living in Ireland including both the Roman Catholics and Protestants (*Essays and Introductions* 210). In this respect, whether it is racial or religious, any aspects of discrimination cannot be found in his nationalist thought as in the discrimination executed by Nazism. According to his ideal, the chasm between the Roman Catholics and Protestants should be healed and both of them should be eventually tied to a single center pole which is the ancient Gaeldom.

More essential and, at the same time, fatal to Yeats’s cultural nationalism, however, is its lack of brutal element. As mentioned above, if his aristocratic idealism could have been realized in the Irish history, a certain degree of oppressive activities, not to say injuring nor killing of other people as in the Nazism tyranny, should have been required. In fact, in the third stanza of “Ancestral Houses,” Yeats admits that some violent “bitterness” is indispensable to creating “the sweetness” and “the gentleness” which the

aristocratic life of the Ascendancy enjoyed :

Some violent bitter man, some powerful man
Called architect and artist in, that they,
Bitter and violent men, might rear in stone
The sweetness that all longed for night and day,
The gentleness none there had ever known ; . . . (17-21)

But Yeats himself did not have such violent bitterness. On the contrary, he loathed it and eventually denied the brutal actions in the movement for the independence in Ireland. Yeats's denial of brutalities, especially of military actions, is peculiarly expressed in a deeply remorseful tone in "Easter, 1916 :"

What is it but night fall ?
No, no, not night but death ;
Was it needless death after all ?
.....
We know their dream ; enough
To know they dreamed and are dead ;
And what if excess of love
Bewildered them till they died ?
.....
A terrible beauty is born. (lines 65-67, 70-73, 80, *The Collected Poems* 181-82)

As the phrase "We know their dream" indicates, Yeats fully acknowledges the cause of those who rose in the military revolt against England. What he cannot accept is only their "means." As David Lloyd remarks, the

legitimacy of the violence in the founding of a state “is established not in itself but in the subsequent remembrance it invokes” (72). Therefore Yeats says that the death of soldiers in the revolt is “needless” or “needless death.” There is no doubt that he deplores their deaths which have no meanings in themselves. Such half-antagonistic and half-sympathetic emotion of his is distinctly expressed in the phrase, “A terrible beauty is born.”

In “Meditations in Time of Civil War,” Yeats’s abhorrence of the bloodshed is in a sense more thoroughgoing. As Yeats himself comments, the bloodshed in the Civil War was caused only by “hatred” (*The Collected Poems* 461). Therefore, for him, the violence in the Civil War was no longer a terrible but acceptable “beauty,” but only a sterile class-hatred. In the last poem of the sequence, “I see Phantoms of Hatred and of the Heart’s Fullness and of the Coming Emptiness,” he symbolized the fruitless deed in a cry for vengeance for Jacques Molay, the Grand Master of the Templars :

‘Vengeance upon the murderers,’ the cry goes up
 ‘Vengeance for Jacques Molay.’ In cloud-pale rags, or in lace,
 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 ; and I, my wits astray
 Because of all that senseless tumult, all but cried
 For vengeance on the murderers of Jacques Molay.
 (9-16)

The violent revolt gave him some psychological shock. And as M. L. Rosenthal remarks, “[i]n reaction to that shock, the poet sees that he and his ideals for Irish life and culture have no part in the world of killers let loose in the land” (233). Thus his abhorrence of the violence not only prevented him from executing his nationalist politics efficiently but also

displaced him from the symbolical role as a nationalist poet in the nation-to-be-born. Ironically the very bloodshed took the place of him. The violent revolt was much more appealing than the nationalist poet as a symbol of new Ireland. Concerning with their appealing power relationship, Lloyd writes as follows :

There is thus a very real sense in which those martyrs, whose self-sacrifice in the name of Ireland asserts their identity with the nation, displace or substitute for the poet's symbolic deployment of the lore and landscape of the country. (71)

Indeed, theoretically, it is possible for a nationalist poet to play such symbolical role as national martyrs. But whether he succeeds in it or not depends on how skillfully he could "organize the incoherent desires of the population towards the goal of popular unity, which is the essential prerequisite of an effective political struggle for national liberation" (Lloyd 70). As the discussion up to this point exemplifies, it is obvious that Yeats lacked such skill. His cultural nationalism is much less politics than aesthetics. Consequently he was displaced from the current context of the Irish movement for independence and was unable to identify himself with it.

II

Although Yeats lost his identity in the violent revolt in the Civil War, he never abandoned his role as a nationalist poet. He sought the place where his cultural nationalism could bring its meaning into full play and found it in his own house, Thoor Ballylee which he bought in 1917. The house is in reality a kind of tower and, as Edward Malins explains, "Yeats did not live there all the time and the house was in any case really only habitable as a

summer residence” (101). The tower implies many symbolical meanings to him, and he constructed there his own world in which he could accomplish what he lost in the real context of Ireland.

At first, in the very substantial meaning, the old tower evokes Yeats the sense of continuity as the late endurance of the cultured Gaeldom. Concerning the sense of historical continuity that the poet cherished with his old tower, Edward Larrissy writes as follows :

He could look back at an unbroken line of succession : from Anglo-Irish Ascendancy—or at least squirearchy—up to distant Norman-Gaelic lord —or at least lordring. (164)

The tower was one of castles or towers built by the Norman family during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and had been occupied by Gaelic-speaking people until the seventeenth century. Therefore it is easy to understand that the “sense of continuity” which the house implies could suffice his desire of preservation of the ancient Gaelic culture.

Moreover the old tower is not only the substantial monument which inherits and preserves the ancient Gaeldom but also the symbolic locus where Yeats could revive the ancient culture and reconstruct the Irish cultural identity as he assumes. In “My House,” the second poem of the sequence of “Meditations in Time of Civil War,” Yeats is meditating over his house as follows :

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 rain or sound
Of every wind that blows ;
The stilted water-hen
Crossing stream again
Scared by the splashing of a dozen cows ; . . .
(1-10)

While projecting a landscape of ancient rural life on the current scenery surrounding his house, he exalts his house as the place where the symbolic rose of Ireland "can break in flower." He thinks that the self-delighting "sweetness" of the ancient Gaelic life could overflow again in his house "as a center of a community" (P. Th. M. G. Liebrechts 320). Thus in his meditative mind, the tower is transformed into the special locus which functions as the center of his cultural nationalism.

As discussed in the first section of this essay, however, the identification with the ancient Gaeldom, consequently the cultural nationalism of Yeats, did not work with the current history of Ireland any longer. In this sense, Thoor Ballylee, as the symbol of his nationalism, could not find its meaning, as Yeats assumed, in the real context of contemporary Ireland. Therefore the figure of the tower must be filled with "the other worldness" with which the artistic mind of Yeats ingeniously invests it.

Although it is separated from the actual world, the other world is quite "real" for him. Or it can be said that it is more "real" for him than any substantial experiences in the actual world in the sense that he could identify himself with it in the fullest meaning. But the "reality" in the other world must be accomplished by highly artificial rejection of the actual world.

At first, as an actual condition, Yeats was excluded from the real battling field and was closed in his tower. Indeed, as Marins points out, he

lacked veritable news about the war and inevitably relied upon “odd snippets of gossip which are reported ‘telegraphically’” (Malins 101). Such isolation and lack of information of his are depicted in “Stare’s Nest by My Window :”

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.

A barricade of stone or of wood ;
 Some fourteen days of civil war ;
 Last night they trundled down the road
 That dead young soldier in his blood :
 Come build in the empty house of the stare.
 (6-15)

As the passage above shows, he feels very uneasy about the scarce information of the battle field and, consequently, could but picture the state outside the door by meditating over it. Little sympathy of his for the fighting soldiers, however, is expressed here. Indeed, he feels anxious about the calamity of the war as in the phrase, “A man is killed, or house burned.” But his anxiety is not directed toward the calamity itself but toward the dissolution of his own cultural identity which it should bring about. And it is the ruining state of his old tower which most strikingly evokes the dissolution of the cultural identity in his mind. Therefore his lamenting for the killing is subsequently replaced by his anxiety about the declining of his own house. And he calls for the honey-bees, “which are emblems of creativity,” into his house so that they might rebuild there the declining

culture he assumes (Harold Bloom 354).

Such substantial isolation of his is very crucial to the symbolization of his tower as the locus where he could enjoy his ideal to the full. The isolation can paradoxically exclude the cumbersome shadow of the war out of his tower in the midst of it. Without its interference, he could tranquilly construct his own symbolical "world." In this sense it can be said that, although he was materially locked in his house, his mind ingeniously locked out the actual situation of the war, that is, out of the genuine world of his.

Secondly a certain degree of "atemporality" is filling the inside of the house so that the space in its inside could be secluded from the reality of declining time. It is true that such atemporality is partly indebted to "the sense of continuity" which, as discussed before, Yeats perceives in the very substantial meaning of his tower. "The sense of continuity" makes his tower the symbolical locus which embodies the ancient Gaeldom as well as being his current residence. But what contributes to the "atemporality" most is his appreciation of "eternity."

In "My Table," his praise for eternity is revealed in his admiration of "a changeless work of art" which, as a piece of furniture, fills the inside of his house with "atemporality :"

Two heavy trestles, and a board
Where Sato's gift, a changeless sword,
By pen and paper lies,
That it may moralise
My days out of aimlessness.
A bit of an embroidered dress
Covers its wooden sheath.
Chaucer had not drawn breath
When it was forged. In Sato's house,
Curved like new moon, moon-luminous,

It lay five hundred five years. (1-11)

But the changeless work itself can be regarded as “static,” “unproductive” or even “empty” (Thomas R. Whitaker 185). What sustains its value does not reside in itself but in the “heart” which can evaluate it. Therefore Yeats says, “only an aching heart / Conceives a changeless work of art” (“My Table” 13-4). In this sense it can be asserted that what contributes most to the “atemporality” of his house is not the changeless Japanese sword itself but the heart of the poet which can appreciate its eternal value.

There is no doubt his appreciation of the changeless work of art is related to his will to inherit and maintain the ancient Gaelic culture of Ireland. And such intention of his necessarily requires the rejection of the gradual decline and of the ignorance of the tradition, that is the rejection of “the real history of Ireland.” On this ground, the inside of his house should be imbued with “atemporality” so that it could become the locus which can be kept from declining.

Lastly the tower is the place of “solitude.” Although he lived there with his wife, daughter and son, his symbolical world, which is constructed in “Meditations in Time of Civil War,” allows no one to share it. In the poem, he refers to his descendants but it is uncertain for him whether they could inherit and maintain “a vigorous mind” like his :

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 ?
 (“My Descendants” 9-12)

Also he declares that he tries to regard the masonry of his house as the

monument of his friends and himself. But it does not mean that they positively work with him in order to preserve "the monument." They are only the elements of his memoration as the ancient Gaelic culture, not the active co-creators of his monument.

Thus, to say nothing of the soldiers fighting in the war, no one can participate in his "toiling" of maintaining the ancient Gaeldom. As a result, he must work alone in the isolated tower like his spiritual ancestor "Milton's Platonist :"

A winding stair, a chamber¹ arched with stone,
A grey stone fireplace with an open hearth,
A candle and written page.
Il Penseroso's Platonist toiled on
In some like chamber, shadowing forth
How the daemonic rage
Imagined everything.
Benighted travellers
From markets and from fairs
Have seen his midnight candle glimmering. ("My House" 11-20)

Although the candle light of his nightly toiling could be the guiding light of "benighted travellers" as the light from a lighthouse, his "chamber arched with stone" is indubitably separated from worldly affairs. As this separation designates, his pursuit of idealism is never consistent with the crude real world. Therefore he has to withdraw from it into the solitary world of his own.

Thus Yeats's mental world in the poem is constructed upon "isolation" and invested with "atemporality" and "solitude." And these three characteristics produce the sense of "the other worldness" of his tower. This is accomplished by the ingenuously artistic strategy of his. In this way, he

succeeds both in freeing his tower from the actual history of Ireland and in recovering there his identity as a nationalist poet.

III

However elaborately it may be constructed, the world of the poet is an unstable one. It is incessantly being threatened to collapse. Actually Yeats already realizes it. Therefore his calling for the creative bees in “The Stare’s Nest by My Window” can be read as rather a desperate cry than a confident will for reconstruction :

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. (1-5)

Although the image of bees may temporarily console his anxiety, the fact that his old tower is declining cannot be denied nor expelled from his consciousness.

On the one hand Yeats wants to reconstruct the ancient Gaelic culture which is assumed to form the firm identity of the newly born Ireland. On the other hand, however, he fully knows that it is difficult to maintain the tradition eternally and that it is even almost impossible to revive it in the current condition of Ireland. The ancient culture could be restored only in his own mind but it cannot endure for so long a time.

Such an ambiguous consciousness of his is expressed in the phrase, “the symbolic rose can break in flower,” in “My House” (line 4). By comparing the phrase to Isaiah in Scripture, Dwight H. Purdy argues that it reveals the

poet's hopeless desire. "The roses in such stony soil grow, but they cannot take root, and they die" (Purdy 92). Indeed, the symbolic rose "breaks" in flower, not "keeps on flowering forever." The poet surely recognizes that such an ancient tradition cannot be consistent with the current Ireland even if it could be revived.

Moreover Yeats conceives that his age is a sort of "great turning point" of human history with which something is to close and another is to open. Such peculiar sensibility of his can be seen in the cyclical view of human history which is minutely explained in *A Vision* (265-300) or expressed in the poems like "The Second Coming" (*The Collected Poems* 187). Based on this cyclical view of history, he sees in the Irish Civil War, as well as in the larger war in Europe, "the microcosm of an epoch that was disintegrating" (T. R. Henn 19). The disintegrating force is so irresistible that he is forced to be conscious of the declining of his symbolic tower :

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.
The Primum Mobile that fashioned us
Has the very owls in circles move ; . . .
("My Descendants" 13-8)

The new era as Yeats conceives, however, must imply both hope and anxiety. It is obvious that, for him, the hope means the revival of the ancient Gaelic culture as the profound identity of the Irish people. But the fact is that his anxiety overwhelmed the hope. The actual calamity of the Irish Civil War never allowed him to rejoice his hope peacefully. What threatens his tranquil meditating within his symbolic tower was the immedi-

ate catastrophe just outside his door.

In this way, the disaster disturbed both his hope and peaceful symbolizing of the tower. His mind could not keep staying in the tower. He could possibly expel the great war of the Continent from his mind by regarding it as only one example of the “turning point” of human history. But he could never do that concerning the war of his country. This is not only because the war is the immediate one outside his door, but, more significantly, because the fighting soldiers and the poet are strongly united with each other as the same “nation” although their means for the independence are quite inconsistent with each other.

In “The Stare’s Nest by My Window,” Yeats declares his mental union with the soldiers outside his door by addressing both them and himself in the first person plural :

We had fed the heart on fantasies,
The heart’s grown brutal from the fare ;
More substance in our enmities
Than in our love ; O honey-bees,
Come build in the empty house of the stare. (16-20, emphasis added)

Despite the fact that the soldiers and the poet are now separated between the name of “enmities” and “love,” both of them originated in the same root as a “nation.”

Moreover, the poet even shows his envy at the soldiers fighting for the country of theirs and, of course, of his. In “The Road at My Door,” his envy is distinctly depicted in the clear contrast between the carefree gaiety of a soldier who “Comes cracking jokes of civil war / As though to die by gunshot were / The finest play under the sun” and the nervous dismalness of the poet who is, being kept in his tower, “caught / In the cold snows of

a dream" (3-5, 14-5).

But the poet never gave up his ideal nor accepted the revolt even though he envied the soldiers of the war. His ideal was never compatible with the violent revolt. In the practical sense, the construction of a new state is necessarily accompanied with the rejection of the former state. It produces a certain chasm in the history. In this sense, it implies an eccentric movement which will be ceaselessly multiplying discontinuities. On the other hand, Yeats's ideal nationalism is somehow the restoration of the disintegrating state into the integrated one in the former period. It is based upon continuity and generates a concentric movement in which the disintegrated fragments will be united into the original oneness. Thus, to some extent, his ideal nationalism is inappropriate to the eccentric nature of the construction of the new state.

There is no doubt that, as the phrase, "the symbolic rose can break in flower," indicates, Yeats realizes that his idealism cannot be fully rooted in the newly born country, and that he is staying in the absent culture which has already been abandoned by the eccentric movement in the Irish history. But he cannot get out of his tower, that is, cannot give up his own ideal as an artist.

Such ambivalence of his does not mean that he totally gives his credence to both the chivalrous revolt and his own ideal. The fact is that he can merely deny neither of them. It is an obvious compromise of his. Therefore he cannot completely identify himself with either of the two grounds. Consequently he cannot but be perpetually vacillating between them. In the sequence of "Meditations in Time of Civil War," the incurable agony of his is represented in the ingenious unification of antitheses such as inside-outside, eternity-history, solitude-worldliness, hatred-love and coldness-gaiety.

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Synopsis

The Ineffaceable Border in Yeats's "Meditations in Time of Civil War"

This essay aims to examine W. B. Yeats's unstable state of mind in the midst of the movements for independence in Ireland which is expressed in "Meditations in Time of Civil War." The key term is "nationalist poet." As Yeats himself admits, he expected to be a "nationalist poet." It is true that the term cannot decisively be defined. In this essay, therefore, the term is used for loosely designating "the poet who can represent the nationality of his homeland in the form of poetry."

Especially concerning Yeats as a nationalist poet, two points are specifically referred to. The one is his patriotism, and the other is the Irish identity that he assumed. The latter forms the central concept of his nationalism. While his ardent love for his country fully qualified him as a nationalist poet, his excessively idealistic nationalism made the qualification invalid. Therefore he himself could not be sure whether he could be called a "nationalist poet" or not.

Such uncertainty of his arised when the movements for independence in Ireland took violent turns. At that moment, the inefficiency of his idealistic nationalism became explicit. His nationalist concept could find its place nowhere in the actual movement for independence. That situation inevitably obliged him to reconsider his role as a nationalist poet. The process of this unsettled inquiry is depicted in the whole sequence of "Meditations in Time of Civil War."

In the first section of this essay, inefficiency of Yeats's nationalism is examined. His inclination to "elitism" of the Protestant Ascendancy caused the negligence of the majority of the Irish people, that is, the Roman Catholics. And his denial of violent activities kept his nationalist concept remaining an unpractical idealism.

The second section is allotted to investigate how Yeats found the appropriate place for his nationalist concept after he was alienated from the actual condition of Ireland. It is true that there is no such place in the actual sense. Therefore he constructs his own symbolical world in his "tower." In the last section, it is proved that Yeats's inquiry of "nationalist poet" is a question which can never be settled. His idealism is totally antithetical to the actual force of history but he could abandon neither of them. Therefore he has to remain in perpetual agony between them.