

**The Tool of Civilization: The Use of Violence in W.B. Yeats's
*The Tower***

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The poet Robinson Jeffers wrote, in his piece "The Bloody Sire," that "Stark violence is still the sire of all the world's values. Do not weep, let them play, / Old violence is not too old to beget new values" (Jeffers, Lines 5 and 16-17). As long as there has been society, there has been conflict and war. Battles over land, religion, or pride have dominated the events of history, and left our pasts marred with bloodshed. Although there is a contemporary outcry for peace and diplomacy, most of our world continues to be surrounded with war. The fight for natural resources, scuffle over civil rights, and war over religion grabs most the news headlines daily. This constant presence of conflict leaves the idea that all society is established and maintained with violence. While there is an element of violence that is strictly excessive and without redeeming after effects, violence is what created great cities and past empires throughout history. This idea is prevalent nowhere more than within the poetry of W.B. Yeats. Through looking at his collection of poems entitled *The Tower*, one can see this particular acknowledgment of violence. Both "The Tower" and the poems collected under the title "Meditations in Time of Civil War," show that there is a place and use for war. These poems probe into the notion that war and violence are not only prevalent but actually inevitable within a society. While many may believe war is a simple act of brutality and greed, the poetry within *The Tower* suggests that violence is not merely unavoidable but acts as an actual progenitor to civilization.

While W.B. Yeats was writing *The Tower*, his native Ireland was in constant conflict. Though published in 1928, much of the poetry in *The Tower* reflects these

events and their aftermaths. In this era, Ireland fought not only the English for independence in the Anglo-Irish War but also a bloody civil war ("Anglo-Irish Treaty"). With his country immersed in constant battle and bloodshed, it is no surprise that Yeats dealt with violence in much of his writing. He was able to transport these contemporary conflicts and political views into his poetics using violent imagery and personal experience. The readings of *The Tower* chronicle both Yeats's acknowledgment of violence and his use of real events to imply that civilization is incomprehensible without war.

In *The Tower*, Yeats's conviction in the belief that there is an inevitability of violence in moments of social change is apparent. While the title poem of the collection is foremost a commentary on growing old, it does relay important aspects of violence. "The Tower (1926)," in summation, is basically an aged man, as the narrator who is wrestling with growing old and reflecting on the importance of life. He notes the frivolity of most pursuits and finishes his commentary on the belief that life passes just as clouds and bird cries. In the poem, the narrator speaks a great deal of the passing of time and questions the permanence of things such as beauty and power. He remarks on man's vanity and desire for trivial things, since they will fail in time. He likens these pursuits with the temporary status of the body as the poem shows that they will both ultimately fade. It appears much more worthwhile, in the speaker's mind, to commit to a life of study and knowledge rather than a life of chasing pleasures. The speaker remarks on a personal note:

I have prepared my peace

With learned Italian things

And the proud stones of Greece,

Poet's imaginings

And memories of love,

Memories of the words of women,

All those things whereof

Man makes a superhuman (Yeats, Lines 157-164).

The only things that the man of the poem feels really endure are intellect and love. These are worthwhile achievements that, even in age and death, will bring the most satisfaction to a person. Few things in this life that have permanence, and they are most often not the things that people covet most.

The speaker recalls beauty as one of these empty quests that seem to weigh heavily on man's life. He mentions the praise of Mary Hynes as a specific example of this fleeting and blind endeavor. According to Thomas Flanagan and his article "Yeats, Joyce, and the Matter of Ireland," Hynes is a figure in the work of Gaelic poet Anthony Raftery and made immortal in Ireland through the lyrics of his songs for her beauty (Flanagan, 51). In *Mythologies*, Yeats's storybook of famous Irish folklore, he describes Mary Hynes as "...the handsomest girl in Ireland, her skin was like dribbled snow, and she had blushes in her cheeks" (*Mythologies*, 24). In "The Tower," the men of the town sing these songs of Mary's beauty and chase her endlessly without ever having laid eyes on her. The myth of her beauty becomes so encompassing that it actually drives men mad. They lust for her beauty and allure and do not pursue her for something lasting, such as love.

The speaker of "The Tower" imparts the actual value of beauty in life as he,

almost humorously, notes the fact that it was a blind man that gave the world the most beautiful woman in history.

Strange, but the man who made the song was blind;

Yet, now I have considered it, I find

That nothing strange; the tragedy began

With Homer that was a blind man,

And Helen has all living hearts betrayed (Lines 49-53).

Beauty is so vain and misleading that the persona of the poem feels it most fitting that it should be perfected by someone that could not even see.

The narrator continues in his commentary on life as he then tackles the presence of power. During this time, the social structure of Ireland allowed for powerful families to rule over the rest. While that is a common theme in many societies, the speaker presents a gruesome account of the true power that the few held during his time. In Lines 28-32 he speaks of one lady, Mrs. French, who was so commanding that she could punish people brutally for their insubordination. He remembers how

A serving-man, that could divine

That most respected lady's every wish,

Ran and with the garden shears

Clipped an insolent farmer's ears

And brought them in a little covered dish.

In order to maintain complete allegiance within her land, Mrs. French would instill fear in her subordinates. It seems that violence was the most affective means of maintaining order and structure within her society. Furthermore, Virginia Pruitt, in her article "Return

to Byzantium: W.B. Yeats and "The Tower," reflects on these lines as a troubling illustration of power. She recalls the example from the poem in writing that "There is Mrs. French, whose eccentric whim was, through the perspicacity of her demented serving man, so expeditiously fulfilled" (Pruitt, 151). Pruitt believes that the lady was seemingly drunk with authority. Her actions were excessive, and this violent account is an exemplification of power ruling over men's lives.

One interesting thought conveyed in "The Tower" is the idea that in man's pursuit of these perishable vanities, beauty and power mainly, he appeared to have created something far worse, death and war. In the third section of the poem, the speaker states that

Death and life were not
Till man made up the whole,
Made lock, stock and barrel
Out of his bitter soul (Lines 148-151)

The poem suggests that God did not create these terrible acts, but that man alone is responsible for the horrors of death and war in his false pursuits. They were not a part of the world until man and his ambition took hold. As it appears in the poem, it is within the natural actions of man to bring about war and death through naivete and selfishness. These are the attributes that he created society and wealth with by his own hand.

However, an interesting aspect of the poem is that no matter how terrible death appears, there actually seems to be a redeeming quality in it. The next several stanzas depict a positive outcome for all this struggle. Yeats writes that in being dead, "we rise / Dream and so create / Translunar Paradise" (Lines 153-155). These lines give the

impression that there is a real worth in war. Although people are killed, their deaths create a supposed paradise or an overall good. Yeats exemplifies this paradox in a later stanza as he likens past events, even the fallen dead, to the stacking twigs that create a bird's nest. These twigs and men have fallen but they have not fallen in vain. They are still able to further the course of nature, or the knowledge of people, even in death as they create a nest for people to benefit from.

Virginia Pruitt, in "Return from Byzantium: W. B. Yeats and "The Tower," compares the metaphor of the nest to Yeats's personal advancement. She says that "Through the exercise of pride, faith, and of will, his past will pervade his future creative enterprises" (Pruitt, 156). In short, she believes that Yeats is the bird that is seated atop the stacked twigs of the past. He is benefiting from past accomplishments and efforts as he takes them into later life. She goes on to note that all artists of the present store these "twigs" in their memory. It is this memory that creates the platform for them to convey new ideas with symbols of the past. Both intellectual and political events add to these memories that help create the art of the present. In short, past wars can create present beauty, or, more expansively, violence can be a progenitor of a civilization.

Bruce Wilson, in an article relating Yeats's poetry to Eastern thought, actually takes this poem, as a whole, as representing a way to live life. He suggests in "The Tower," that "the self either makes everything a part of itself, upon which the great sweetness "flows into the breast," or remains on the dualistic plane of hatred and remorse" (Wilson, 41). Wilson views the lines as representing two opposing ways to use the past. A person can either take past events and become a part of them positively by learning, or simply dwell on the past and allow it to poison their will with, as he states it,

"hatred and remorse."

From no matter what perspective, it is clear that "The Tower" suggests violence as an inevitability. While perhaps Yeats did not enjoy or condone men going to war, his poems suggest that he did see it as something that was going to happen regardless, and war ironically had the chance of providing a heroic good for the rest of society. In the closing lines of "The Tower" the narrator resigns himself to viewing death as a passing thing; a phase in the repetitive gyre of life that occurs just as any other event. The narrator asserts the belief that

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... (Lines 189-193)

While these deaths are terrible events, they are a part of life that people must endure. They will fade just as the clouds fade when the sun goes down. These lines assert that fate is real. There is nothing that man can do during his lifetime to change his inevitable demise. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in "Principles of the Mind": Continuity in Yeats's Poetry," surmises that no matter what people did throughout their lives in the poem, "The Tower" ends in the concrete fact that "Fate has not been changed or overthrown" (Spivak, 891). No matter how humans interpret their mortality and achieve their will, they will unavoidably die. Mortality spurs some to greatness and others to meekness; however, it has the same fate in store for both. "The Tower" is a direct example of Yeats's depiction of violence as an inevitability that is unavoidable yet industrious.

The next poem in *The Tower* collection is "Ancestral Houses." It is the first poem in a subset collection entitled "Meditations in Time of Civil War." This poem appears to be an overall commentary on social status. In "Ancestral Houses," the narrator describes the beautiful homes of the rich and the haughty greatness that comes along with wealth. The speaker depicts beautifully manicured lawns, gardens with peacocks wandering about, and elaborate galleries with portraits of family ancestors on the wall. "Ancestral Houses" begins with this depiction of a beautiful setting, and then follows it by relaying the proper etiquette that the hierarchies of this home are to abide by. The narrator believes there is a certain arrogant tone that comes along with wealth. It is a necessary element in the attitude of power that separates the classes with great distinction. The speaker states, for example, how the elite within society should never "stoop" to a servant's position or even adhere to another's "beck and call" (Lines, 7-8). There is a haughty attitude that the privileged should project at all times. After this description, the poem then moves into the proper modes of rule. It describes the appropriate attitude that a ruler should maintain and inserts the decay of power as a prevalent fear. The poem ends with contrasting the beauty of the home to the brutality required to create it. "Ancestral Houses" finishes with the final stanzas establishing the speaker's fear of a weak inheritor. He worries that a future ruler might allow the house to crumble and the greatness of the home to eventually be linked only to the violence it took to build it.

The opening stanzas of "Ancestral Houses" portray the tranquil background of life within the homes of the wealthy. However, while it is beauty and serenity that surround the scene, the creation and maintenance of these houses is quite contrary. Deborah Fleming, in an article discussing Yeats's traditionalist mentality, remarks on the

poem's fear of losing noble status and luxury. She writes "The wealthy aristocrat, undistracted from work by ambition, never has to "stoop to a mechanical/ Or servile shape, at others' beck and call." Now, however, the inherited glory of the rich is in danger of becoming a mere shell. At one time there was real distinction between the elite and the working class. Now, in more modern times, the wealthy do not have the overarching power. Status is merely an act of tradition and not a real mark of class.

The persona of "Ancestral Houses" cherishes status and does not wish for something like a weak successor for example boobs to vanquish everything the wealthy have earned. The only way to maintain the influence of a powerful name is through violence and harsh rule. It is passion and ultimate conviction that the preservation of this prosperity and beauty will stand. The speaker of the poem states:

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. (Lines 17-21)

It is the "violent bitter man" that allows for artists and architects to create beauty and a house to grow. They build their houses and art in stone as to create something to last. Their establishment, although serene and beautiful, is a statement of their power. It was created with violence and is built to succeed and last through the ages. It is this violence and bitterness that got these men into power, and it is violence and bitterness that will keep them there.

Further evidence of this gritty rise to the top comes in the second stanza of

"Ancestral Houses." The narrator says that:

As if some marvelous empty sea-shell flung
 Out of the obscure dark of the rich streams,
 And not a fountain, were the symbol which
 Shadows the inherited glory of the rich. (Lines 13-16)

These lines show that the proper symbol of these men's inheritance is not a manicured fountain but, as the speaker states, an ". . .empty sea-shell" from the dark streams. Michael North, in his article "The Ambiguity of Repose: Sculpture and the Public Art of W. B. Yeats," aligns the fountain with the trait of excess. He states that ". . .surely the fountain of "Ancestral Houses," with its effortless flowing, its ability to "choose whatever shape it wills," its "self-delight," only completed and perfected to become even more self-contained" (North, 390). He believes the fountain represents the wonder and grandeur of the wealthy. They can create their own happiness, in any gluttonous manner, and it will take shape and continue to flow at their bidding. However, this does not appear to be a comprehensive translation of the lines. While the speaker may allude to the fountain as a more current symbol, he defers to the shell from the dark streams as more fitting. Wealth and power were not simply handed to these families. Through the narrator's allusions to darkness and shadows, it seems that status was taken, not in a light and deserving manner but possibly, through maniacal and gruesome conduct.

Dwight H. Purdy remarks on these images of the fountain and the sea-shell with complete contrast to North's findings. He writes that "Yeats develops the image of an "abounding glittering" fountain, a symbol of freedom.. .But he reconsiders. The inexhaustible fountain seems not now an apt symbol" (Purdy, 88). Purdy goes on to

describe the sea-shell as a most fitting representation of the wealthy. He argues that Yeats shows "The estates of the rich now are lovely, 'marvelous,' but empty, a word that echoes at the poem's end" (88). He believes that Yeats purposely contrasts the majestic image of the fountain with that of the echoing and hollow sea-shell to depict the difference between the aristocracy of the past and the aristocracy of the present. Where there was once greatness and worth, there is now a mere casing and whisper of the past. One of the overlying themes of "Ancestral Houses" appears to be the notion that violence is the most proven characteristic of a successful rule. It is the most effective way to not only achieve great wealth and power but to maintain it. Without the presence of violence, the aristocracy only holds monetary value over the rest of society and not any other form of power.

The violence and bitterness of command goes hand in hand with the greatness these men created. In Yeats's *Essays and Introductions*, a commentary on politics, relationships, and his own writing, the author actually presents the idea that, "all noble things [including "great nations and classes"] are the result of warfare" (*Essays*, 321). Although Yeats's outlook on this paradox may have changed from when he wrote it in 1910, his work in "Ancestral Houses" in 1923 did seem to pay tribute to these ancestral men as men of arms. At the end of the final two stanzas of "Ancestral Houses," the speaker begs the audience to reflect on the past. He follows the grand description of these homes by asking what if people "But take our greatness with our violence?" and "...our greatness with our bitterness?" (Lines 32 and 40). It appears that these things all relate. These houses and names would never stand or establish without the event of violence; it takes violence and bitterness to achieve greatness in this respect.

The speaker later notes that while these great men may have created their desired houses and names, these earned things can crumble with simple generational inheritance. The speaker praises the violent and bitter men but calls their grandchildren "mice" that are too weak-willed to maintain the proper power structure. Rob Doggett, in his article dissecting the "Meditations in Time of Civil War " and "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," speaks on this generational weakening. Doggett states that "Ancestral Houses" portrays the belief that "In every home once occupied by a great man resides "the great-grandson of that house" who, for all the "bronze and marble" of his surroundings, is "but a mouse," a useless creature living among halls constructed by men long since dead" (Doggett, 154). Doggett believes the speaker glorifies this violence and bitterness, and anyone without those characteristics of rule is "a mouse" that is only to demolish the haughty greatness of his ancestors.

"Ancestral Houses" supports the premise that Yeats describes violence as a progenitor to a civilization. Violence is a trait endemic in the proper character of great ruling men. Violence stands behind the historic establishment of wealthy homes. And violence is revealed as the one necessary attribute of power. Without it Ireland would not have the class structure and beautiful establishments that the speaker holds so dear and the ability to distinguish master from servant. In a sense, violence is the very history that the Irish society was founded upon.

One interesting characteristic of the brutality in Yeats's poetry is the historical accuracy of it. While writing *The Tower*, from about 1923-1928, Yeats was surrounded by war. As noted previously, during these years he worked through the Anglo-Irish War and the onset of the Irish Civil War. These conflicts provided him with not only a

window into violence but a proper historical account of the brutalities of war. In all actuality, without Yeats's work the documentation on the Anglo-Irish and Irish Civil War would be a much poorer account. Many of the gruesome events depicted in Yeats's poems are actual events that took place within his very County of Galway in Ireland. While some of the stories were relayed to him through his friend, and lover, Maude Gonne while he was away, more often than not, Yeats was in Ireland witnessing these dramatic moments himself.

For instance, in "Meditations in Time of Civil War" the poem "The Stare's Nest by My Window" depicts the image of a group of soldiers near the speaker's home. It is two weeks into the Irish Civil War and this group of soldiers have one of their young warriors dead in a cart wheeling down the path (Lines 12-14). As Yeats reports in his autobiographies, this was an actual event that occurred just down the road from his tower of Thoor Ballylee (*Autobiographies*). He watched from his own home as these men made camp and carted their dead compatriot away from battle. The speaker had hoped to create a house that would embody strength as well as wisdom and sweetness. He continually invites the birds and bees to build in the crevices of the structure. While their building does weaken the walls, it allows the home to be shelter to others. The narrator wants his home to be "A barricade of stone or of wood;" somewhere safe for men and animals alike (Line 11). But his emphasis on the images of power—the man-at-arms, the sword, the soldiers—has driven sweetness away, replaced wisdom with "uncertainty," and given him a heart, as well as a house, of stone. Violence without sweetness, it seems, is no more "great" than sweetness without violence.

Another real event that played part in Yeats's poetry shows itself in the poem

"Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen." In one stanza he writes "...a drunken soldiery/ Can leave the mother, murdered at her door, / To crawl in her own blood, and go scot-free" (Lines 26-28). This is not simply a horrible image of a murdered mother but, as Elizabeth Cullingford in her book *Gender and History in Yeats's Love Poetry* explains it, this is a poetic illustration of what happened to Ellen Quinn one night on her own front doorstep. As the story goes, Quinn was shot dead with her baby in her arms by the ruthless officers of the Black and Tans (*Gender*, 106). While many of Yeats's depictions of violence convey a productive end, some do not. Ellen Quinn's story is one example of the violence that does not push society forward. It is an exemplification of how some violence is excessive and brutal.

One final example, and even more personal than the previous, comes in "The Road at My Door." Yeats writes that "A brown Lieutenant and his men, / Half dressed in national uniform, / Stand at my door..." (Lines 6-8). Yeats is no longer reading the war in the papers or hearing it from others; he is living it firsthand at his very doorstep. These men "[Come] cracking jokes of civil war / As though to die by gunshot were/ the finest play under the sun" (Lines 3-5). These men bring the violence to his very home. And with all the galling and inarticulate manner of rude guests, they actually begin to laugh about the conflict. While the speaker of "Meditations" does view violence as a tool, he does not appear to view it as something to be taken lightly. The humor of these men is portrayed as disillusioned and thoughtless. These real events feed into Yeats's poetry and speak to the violence and harshness of the world around. Yeats uses these atrocities without embellishment or makeup because they are real. They provide the images of a bystander beset by war.

"I see Phantoms of Hatred and of the Heart's Fullness and of the Coming Emptiness" is the final piece within the "Meditations in Time of Civil War." As described in an Elizabeth Cullingford article, this final piece of the "Meditations" collection expresses how Ireland's once noble goal of sovereignty has crumbled into something far more juvenile. She states the poem shows that "What began as the struggle to avenge a genuine wrong, and to gain Ireland's independence from England, has degenerated into fratricidal strife" (Molay, 765).

The poem, now to be referred to simply as "Phantoms," provides the persona's final thoughts on war as a means to properly end the series of "Meditations." The poem begins with a description of a mist that covers everything. This all-too-familiar mist for those who live in Ireland is used as a metaphor to describe the war that surrounds Ireland. The speaker then moves on to talk about how all classes, rich and poor, have united in hate. They have joined in a fruitless cause that achieves nothing but the production of more violence. The poet describes raging crowds crying out for vengeance and deranged troopers metaphorically reaching for nothing in their blind endeavor of hate. The narrator then drastically slows the poem at the third stanza. In an article discussing the technical aspects of Yeats's poetry, Helen Vendler describes stanzas three through five of the poem as "[calming] as the image of a raging crowd is replaced by images of unicorn-borne ladies full of erotic loveliness and "self-delighting reverie"; but they in turn give way to images of a menacing and indifferent fate" (Vendler, 87). Vendler is referring to the three final stanzas of "Phantoms." While the final stanza returns to a more realistic setting, the two previous stanzas delve into a fantastical world with beautiful women riding unicorns. These women appear to represent images of fate. They are calming and

beautiful, but as mentioned before, they do not materialize into a positive symbol for the future as they block out the moon with the unicorns' wings. The poem ends with the final stanza stating that although the speaker feels some regret for not "proving his worth" in these battles, he believes that his conscious would not let him. "Phantoms" appears to forecast a bleak outcome of the Irish Civil War.

"Phantoms" is a harsh commentary on the crumbling of society. While it is still violence and war that create a civilization, the poem shows that it is these same recourses that can destroy it. It is important to note that there is a great deal of difference between the necessary violence of poems such as "Ancestral Houses" and the hate-driven violence of "Phantoms." For example, the narrator begins the second stanza of "Phantoms" by stating that this battle is a matter of "vengeance" (Line 9). "Vengeance" is the cry of the crowd and rage is their catalyst. They do not fight to establish status and power, but they simply rage out of vengeance—to avenge the death of Jacques de Molay. The narrator sees this as empty as he states in the second stanza that the troopers

[Plunge] 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..." (Lines 13-16).

These lines represent the speaker's notion that there is no longer any just cause in this war. Cullingford aptly depicts the lines within the second stanza as "[.. .representing] the damaging psychological effects of a passion for revenge" (Molay, 765). David Dwan seconds that notion. In his article on Yeats's use of hatred, he says that "Yeats criticises the destructiveness and emptiness of revolutionary aspiration. The 'rage driven, rage-

riven, rage-tormented and rage-hungry troop' are possessed by an abstract hatred" (Dwan, 28). The crowds and troopers are driven mad with hate and therefore act with haste and violence. They have skewed a once noble and purposeful cause, independence from England, into unorganized "frenzies" and "monstrous familiar images" (Lines 7-8).

Another important aspect of "Phantoms" comes in the report that the social classes have begun to mix. On two separate occasions the speaker states that within the crowd there is both "cloud-pale rags" and "lace" (Lines 10 and 26). This is a very important note because on several different instances throughout "Meditations" the speaker declares the importance of a stratified society. This mixing of classes appears to be the ultimate mark of a crumbling culture according to the speaker. Cullingford announces that "The crowd of avengers contains both paupers and aristocrats [...]. Traditional class enemies, therefore, are united in the negative emotion of hatred." She goes on to stress the importance of this fact because "They claim a common cause, but we see that their fury is actually directed, not against the murderers of Jacques de Molay but against each other..." (Molay, 765). Jacques de Molay is a 14th Century figure that was head of the Knights of Templar. His knights were accused of heresy and blasphemy, and his burning at the stake, placed at the hands of Pope Clement V and King Philip of France, gave him martyred status. His name became a rallying cry, and Yeats uses this as a blind call to arms. And as Cullingford goes on to explain, "...Molay was a victim of others, but those who would avenge him are also victims..." (Molay, 765). There is no sense in fighting for this man's name. It will only cause more strife and death. This banding together for Molay is likened to the current anarchy in Ireland. The unification of the classes is the worst thing that can happen in a stratified nation. Society is in

shambles because there is no structure, and there is no defined goal as a result of all this violence.

The speaker finishes in the final stanza by restating the worthlessness of the current war. He affirms that although I "Wonder how many times I could have proved my worth / In something that all others understand or share" his conscious is at ease (Lines 34-35). He takes pride in not reveling in this "abstract joy" of the "half-read." (Lines 38-39). Violence with wisdom and purpose is acceptable. Violence out of rage and naivete is the downfall of society.

Throughout "Meditations in Time of Civil War" Yeats refers to an image of a sword. On three occasions he reverts to this particular image as a proper symbol of violence. Yeats's infatuation with the item most likely came from the Japanese sword that was in his home. In a footnote from his anthology of modernism, Lawrence Rainey explains the history behind Yeats's sword. He relays that it was actually a "Japanese admirer [that] gave a family sword to Yeats in March 1920." Rainey goes on to note that the sword was 550 years old and had been passed down from generation to generation within that family line before it was given to Yeats ("Meditations," 316). The donor's name was Sato; therefore, Yeats continually refers to the gift as "Sato's sword."

This sword acts as a logical symbol for the speaker's outlook on violence. Not only does it represent the ability to kill and destroy, but it still embodies beauty and appeal enough to be seen solely as a piece of art. This is a paradox that plays directly into the ideals of the speaker of "Meditations." The speaker feels the sword is so much more than a piece of art or tool of war. He sees it is an inspiration that can direct a person to a more moral or straightened path. In "My Table," he says that

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 their aimlessness. (Lines 1-5)

The sword appears to be a much more powerful entity than the written word in the eyes of the speaker. While the pen and paper appear to falter and change, the sword is an enduring symbol of power that overshadows their worth. The speaker views the sword almost as a guide. It provides him with a proper focus that can pull him out of his "aimlessness," and show him true importance.

One interesting aspect of the sword is how it is depicted within the poetry as "changeless." In line two of "My Table" he lists it as "...Sato's gift, a changeless sword." In lines twenty and twenty-one of the same poem the speaker states "...through the centuries ran / And seemed unchanging like the sword." And finally in "Phantoms," the sword is likened to a mist, as it says in lines four and five, that "...seems unlike itself, that seems unchangeable, / A glittering sword out of the east." This description of the sword emphasizes the ideal that violence has always been around. The sword provides an ancient symbol [in the speaker's mind] suggesting that violence was just as prominent in ancient times as it is in modern times. The sword has lasted through the many centuries because war is a useful tool. It is something that has been associated with man since the beginning and has acted as an instrument in the creation of society. Elizabeth Cullingford describes the sword in "Meditations" as the speaker's ultimate "image of continuity without decline" (Molay, 778). The sword is something that is not only useful,

but it is something that is often necessary within a society. While it does provide the opportunity for cruel and useless violence, overall it is a tool that is used to create civilization. It is a form which, being perfect, will never change.

Another important aspect of the sword is its dual persona. Since the speaker views the sword as both a tool of war and a beautiful piece of art, it is almost the perfect representation of the "terrible beauty" discussed in Yeats's poem "Easter, 1916." In "The Table," the speaker views the sword more as a figure of beauty than one of violence. He refers to the sword as "...a changeless work of art. / Our learned men have urged / That when and where 'twas forged / A marvelous accomplishment, / In painting or in pottery..." (Lines 14-18). The speaker sees the sword as a piece of art that can be likened to work such as paintings and pottery for its beauty.

Cullingford relates this notion of beauty to the surroundings of war during Yeats's time of writing. She writes that "The duality of the symbol results from the fact that Yeats's system constantly "forced" him to consider beauty as an accompaniment of war and wisdom of decay: "Aphrodite rises from a stormy sea.. .Helen could not be Helen but for a beleaguered Troy." She continues in saying that "True beauty, he seems to be suggesting, is always "terrible."" (Molay, 778). Cullingford believes that being submerged in an environment of war, Yeats had no choice but to find beauty in it.

Although the sword can be seen as this unchanging work of art, it is more obviously a symbol of war. It is a symbol that persists as both creator and destroyer in society throughout time. "Meditations in Time of Civil War" uses Sato's sword as a specific example of how violence promoted a civilization. It has been around, in some form, in every culture and every land throughout all of history. It is been handed down

from generation to generation and father to son, just as it was in "The Table," and there is no chance that its presence will fade with time. It exemplifies the truth that both creation and destruction are permanent facets of human life.

The Tower holds many scenes of violence. Some are actual events during this turbulent era in Irish history that show the possible brutality inherent in a society. Some are examples of violence that have no purpose or reason; they are just simple exercises of power. And still, others show how violence is used a proper tool in the creation and destruction of a civilization. Although there is no way to get an accurate depiction of Yeats's personal outlook on war, we can see that through the poems within *The Tower*, the narrators of his poems see violence as an inevitability of mankind. Whether mindless and brutal or unavoidable and beautiful, violence is something that has been around since man began, and it will persist until man's end.

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