

Nationalist Ireland was torn with every kind of passion and prejudice, wanting, so far as it wanted any literature at all, Nationalist propaganda disguised as literature. All the past had been turned into a melodrama with Ireland the blameless hero, and poet, novelist, and historian had but one object, to hiss the villain, and only the minority doubted the greater the talent the greater the hiss. It was all the harder to substitute for that melodrama a nobler form of art, because there had been, however different in their form, villain and victim.

Yeats age 26 -- 1891 after death of Parnell, Irish leader intensely loved and hated

"His art was poetry, and, almost from the first, he used the art as a tool, his avowed purpose being to rid the literature of his country from the insincere, provincial, and hampering forms of "the election rhyme and the pamphlet.""

Louis Bogan, THE POET'S ALPHABET, McGraw-Hill

Yeats meets Lady Gregory in late 1890s, together they go from cottage to cottage in Ireland seeking out folklore of the peasants in simple speech. "Folk is our refuge from vulgarity."

"We should write out our thoughts in as nearly as possible the language we thought them in, as though in a letter to an intimate friend."

With breakdown of traditional religions, the Supernatural came into the purview of Parlor Mediums and Spiritualists. Yeats' wife reported her dreams in which voices were giving metaphors for Yeats to use in his great later poems, "perne in a gyre", &c. Yeats had experimented as an adolescent with telepathy and clairvoyance, in the company of his uncle, George Pollexfen, a student of the occult. Yeats later studied the Christian Cabala and built up, from his own findings and from Blake, Swedenborg and Boehme, theories of visionary truth.

"A poet when he is growing old, will ask himself if he cannot keep his mask and his vision, without new bitterness, new disappointment... Could he if he would, copy Landor who lived loving and hating, ridiculous and unconquered, into extreme old age, all lost but the favor of his muses ... Surely, he may think, now that I have found vision and mask I need not suffer any longer. Then he will remember Wordsworth, withering into eighty years, honoured and empty-witted, and climb to some waste room, and find, forgotten there by youth, some bitter crust."

Yeats, age 52, in 1917

describing the Nobel Prize Medal, which Yeats received in 1923:

It shows a young man listening to a Muse, who stands young and beautiful with a great lyre in her hand, and I think as I examine it, "I was good-looking once like that young man, but my unpractised verse was full of infirmity, my Muse old as it were, and now I am old and rheumatic and nothing to look at, but my Muse is young." I am even persuaded that she is like those Angels in Swedenborg's vision, and moves perpetually "towards the daysprings of her youth."

