Building W. B. Yeats's Later Poetry

The Tower Poems

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ISBN 978-3-031-60783-7 ISBN 978-3-031-60784-4 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-60784-4

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG.
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

The original version of the book has been revised. A correction to this book can be found at https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-60784-4_8

For my parents

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my former supervisor Hugh Haughton at University of York for his invaluable support for the thesis out of which this book has developed. I am deeply grateful to him for his guidance, inspiration, and generous confidence in the project. I would like to thank Derek Attridge for his generosity, support, and encouragement for publication of the work as my former thesis advisory panel member at York, where I had the pleasure of watching swans and waterhens building their nests and young families. I would like to thank Matthew Campbell and Geraldine Higgins, who examined the thesis, for insightful and inspiring comments and encouragement for publication. I wish to thank the staff and archives at the Manuscripts Reading Room of the National Library of Ireland, the Berg Collection and Manuscripts and Archives at the New York Public Library, and the University of York Library, where an essential part of the research for the book was conducted. I am grateful to the Yeats International Summer School for providing me with unforgettable opportunities to visit Sligo, Coole Park, and Thoor Ballylee. I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their carefully constructive and insightful suggestions and comments. I am grateful to Molly Beck and Raghupathy Kalyanaraman for supporting the process of this book's publication.

I am grateful to the International Yeats Society and the Yeats Society of Japan for the precious opportunities they have given me in 2017 to present an early shorter version of part of Chapter 1 and 2 in New York and an early Japanese version of the second section of Chapter 3 in Tokyo. The latter developed into 'Yeats's Tower Project: The Transformation of the

Inscription Poem for the Tower at Ballylee' (in Japanese) in *Journal for Research in Languages and Cultures*, vol. 17 (Tokyo: Center for Research in Languages and Cultures, Hosei University, January 2020) 1–17. An early version of the third section of Chapter 6 appeared as '"Coole and Ballylee, 1931": Yeats's Elegy for the Poetic Demesne' in *Yeats 150: William Butler Yeats 1865–1939*, ed. Declan J. Foley (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2016) 225–36. I am grateful for permission to reprint these works.

I would like to thank my colleagues at Hosei University, Tokyo for their friendship and support. I am grateful to Peter Evans, former colleague at Hosei University, for proofreading early versions of some of the chapters in the manuscript. I wish especially to thank Hosei University for granting me sabbatical leave, during which this project took root.

My deepest personal gratitude to my parents, my sisters, and all my family for their unfailing support and love.

Contents

Abbreviations

ChronY	*A W. B. Yeats Chronology*, by John S. Kelly. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
CL2	*The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats: Volume II, 1896–1900*, ed. Warwick Gould, John Kelly, and Deirdre Toomey. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997.
CL InteLex	*The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats*, gen. ed. John Kelly, Oxford University Press (InteLex Electronic Edition), 2002. Letters cited by Accession number.
CW3	*Autobiographies*, ed. William H. O'Donnell and Douglas N. Archibald, assisted by J. Fraser Cocks III and Gretchen Schwenker, vol. III of *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*. New York: Scribner, 1999.
CW4	*Early Essays*, ed. Richard J. Finneran and George Bornstein, vol. IV of *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*. New York: Scribner, 2007.
CW5	*Later Essays*, ed. William H. O'Donnell, with assistance from Elizabeth Bergmann Loizeaux, vol. V of *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*. New York: Scribner, 1994.
CW9	*Early Articles and Reviews: Uncollected Articles and Reviews written between 1886 and 1900*, ed. John P. Frayne and Madeleine Marchaterre, vol. IX of *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*. New York: Scribner, 2004.
CW10	*Later Articles and Reviews: Uncollected Articles, Reviews, and Radio Broadcasts Written after 1900*, ed. Colton Johnson, vol. X of *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*. New York: Scribner, 2000.
CW13	*A Vision: The Original 1925 Version*, ed. Catherine E. Paul and Margaret Mills Harper, vol. XIII of *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*. New York: Scribner, 2008.

CW14	*A Vision: The Revised 1937 Edition*, ed. Margaret Mills Harper and Catherine E. Paul, vol. XIV of *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats.* New York: Scribner, 2015.
L	*The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Allan Wade. London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954; New York: Macmillan, 1955.
LGJ1	*Lady Gregory's Journals, Volume 1: Books One to Twenty-Nine, 10 October 1916–24 February 1925*, ed. Daniel J. Murphy. Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1978.
LGJ2	*Lady Gregory's Journals, Volume 2: Books Thirty to Forty-Four, 21 February 1925–9 May 1932*, ed. Daniel J. Murphy, with an Afterword by Colin Smythe. Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1987.
Life 1	*W. B. Yeats: A Life, I: The Apprentice Mage, 1865–1914*, by R. F. Foster. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
Life 2	*W. B. Yeats: A Life, II: The Arch-Poet, 1915–1939*, by R. F. Foster. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
Myth 2005	*Mythologies*, ed. Warwick Gould and Deirdre Toomey. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
NLI	Manuscripts in the National Library of Ireland, Dublin.
SB	*The Speckled Bird by William Butler Yeats: An Autobiographical Novel with Variant Versions: New Edition, Incorporating Recently Discovered Manuscripts*, ed. and annot. William H. O'Donnell. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
SS	*The Senate Speeches of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Donald R. Pearce. London: Prendeville, 2001 [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1960].
TSMC	*W. B. Yeats and T. Sturge Moore: Their Correspondence, 1901–1937*, ed. Ursula Bridge. London: Routledge, 1953.
UP2	*Uncollected Prose by W. B. Yeats*, vol. 2, ed. John P. Frayne and Colton Johnson. London: Macmillan, 1975; New York: Columbia University Press, 1976.
VP	*The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach, rev. 3rd printing. 1957; New York: Macmillan, 1966.
VPl	*The Variorum Edition of the Plays of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Russell K. Alspach, assisted by Catharine C. Alspach. London: Macmillan, 1966.
Wade	Allan Wade, *A Bibliography of the Writings of W. B. Yeats*, 3rd ed., rev. and ed. Russell K. Alspach. 1951; London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1968. Cited by item number.

YA	*Yeats Annual.* London: Macmillan, nos. 1–17, 1982–2007; Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, nos. 18–. Cited by issue number.
YVP1, 2, 3, 4	*Yeats's 'Vision' Papers*, gen ed. George Mills Harper, assisted by Mary Jane Harper. 4 vols. London: Macmillan, 1992, vols. 1–3; Palgrave 2001, vol. 4.

Published Manuscript Materials Abbreviations

DBC MM	*'The Dreaming of the Bones' and 'Calvary': Manuscript Materials*, ed. Wayne K. Chapman. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003.
LP MM	*Last Poems: Manuscript Materials*, ed. James Pethica. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997.
MRD MM	*Michael Robartes and the Dancer: Manuscript Materials*, ed. Thomas Parkinson with Anne Brannen. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994.
R MM	*Responsibilities: Manuscript Materials*, ed. William H. O'Donnell. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003.
T MM	*The Tower (1928): Manuscript Materials*, ed. Richard J. Finneran with Jared Curtis and Ann Saddlemyer. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007.
WMP MM	*Words for Music Perhaps and Other Poems: Manuscript Materials*, ed. David R. Clark. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995.
WS MM	*The Winding Stair (1929): Manuscript Materials*, ed. David R. Clark. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995.
WSC MM	*The Wild Swans at Coole: Manuscript Materials*, ed. Stephen Parrish. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Yeats's Tower Project

A Diachronic View

In March 1917, within a year after the Easter Rising in Dublin in April 1916, William Butler Yeats acquired a half-ruined 'Norman' tower 'at Ballylee, which is some three miles north-east of Gort', County Galway, Ireland, which he would call a 'permanent symbol of my work' a decade later.[1] The building, locally known as Ballylee Castle, had enthralled him for the previous two decades since his first visit there. Over a year before this acquisition of the actual building, meanwhile, what is called 'your old wind beaten Tower' had emerged in his poetic terrain—in his preserved drafts, written before 5 December 1915, of a poem eventually titled 'Ego Dominus Tuus' and first published in October 1917 in *Poetry* (Chicago).[2] Yeats's tower project, by which I mean his textual as well as architectural investment from 1915 to 1932 in a particular building at Ballylee, developed over more than a decade into his major poetic project: laying the foundation for his later poetry, renaming the property Thoor Ballylee in 1922—the first year of the Irish Civil War and the Irish Free State—and publishing the book of verse titled *The Tower* in 1928. It was during dramatic national and personal transformation over the period of consecutive wars (the First World War, the Anglo-Irish War and the Irish Civil War) that Yeats carried through the tower project and it served as an organizing principle of his life and work—'the two things that Yeats was so often determined to set at loggerheads', as Seamus Heaney put it, while also

T. Iwatsubo, *Building W. B. Yeats's Later Poetry*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-60784-4_1

remarking 'What is finally admirable is the way his life and his work are *not* separate but make a continuum….'[3] This study of Yeats's tower highlights the delicate exchange between poetry and biography in Yeats's construction of his tower poems in tandem with that of the 'first house' he possessed in his life.[4]

Yeats's tower project brought a major shift in his poetic style and contributed to forming his later poetry at a crucial stage of his life and work. While various studies of Yeats have addressed the significance of the tower as building and symbol, none to my knowledge has sought to trace fully and systematically Yeats's representation of it in chronological order, setting it within the biographical and historical contexts. Building upon earlier influential accounts of Yeats and his tower, the present book brings into focus his step-by-step work of construction as well as the evolving poetic architecture of the tower.[5] The book interweaves the story of Yeats's renovation of and his residence at the actual building with that of its textual representation and transformation over time, drawing upon his correspondence, published texts of his tower-oriented poems and their manuscript materials, including those which have thus far escaped close attention, and proposing some draft-dating revisions. Source materials also include Thomas Sturge Moore's paratextual collaboration with Yeats's textual construction, his cover designs for Yeats's books from *Selected Poems* (1921 [Wade 128]) through *The Tower* (1928 [Wade 158]) to *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1933 [Wade 169]), which record, along with the Yeats-Moore correspondence about them, the trajectory of Yeats's tower, mirroring the differences and continuity among respective representations.[6] *Yeats's 'Vision' Papers*—the automatic script and notebooks from 5 November 1917 to the end of 1923—and *Lady Gregory's Journals*, 'begun, originally, to record her efforts to regain the Lane Pictures for Dublin' in November 1916, also illuminate the intersection and interplay between Yeats's poetic composition, esoteric search for 'metaphors for poetry' and friendships and collaborations in his public and private life.[7] This book focuses on the hitherto underexplored dynamic and diachronic dimension of Yeats's construction of the tower, where different kinds of 'building'—architectural, textual, political, and symbolic—were closely interrelated.[8] Chronologically exploring Yeats's tower poems and his developing project, *Building W. B. Yeats's Later Poetry: The Tower Poems* offers diachronic views and readings of Yeats's tower poetry in the wake of *Responsibilities: Poems and a Play* (Cuala Press, 1914 [Wade 110]) and the Easter Rising—from *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1919 [Wade 124]) to *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1933).

'Cold and Passionate as the Dawn'

Writing a general introduction for his work in 1937, Yeats retrospectively explained a major shift in style in his career: 'I began to make [a language to my liking] when I discovered some twenty years ago that I must seek … a powerful and passionate syntax, and a complete coincidence between period and stanza.'[9] Arguing 'all that is personal soon rots; it must be packed in ice or salt' and 'Ancient salt is best packing'—with 'ancient' possibly evoking the tower—Yeats declared:

> I must choose a traditional stanza, even what I alter must seem traditional. I commit my emotion to shepherds, herdsmen, camel-drivers, learned men, Milton's or Shelley's Platonist, that tower Palmer drew. (*CW5* 213)

The last two items in the list inevitably conjure the tower in Yeats's own work, implicitly bringing his architectural poetics into focus. Yeats's poetic career over half a century is marked by several crucial turning points, often announced by the poet himself as a maker and self-maker.[10] The time referred to as 'some twenty years ago' in the posthumously published essay, indeed, roughly coincides with that of the inception of his tower project. Elaborating on the idea of 'packing', Yeats quotes 'cold and passionate as the dawn' (*CW5* 214) from one of his metapoetic landmarks, 'The Fisherman', whose second stanza in 16 lines demonstrates 'a complete coincidence between period and stanza' and which, significantly, underlies 'The Tower'.

'The Fisherman' (*The Wild Swans at Coole*) and 'A Coat' (*Responsibilities*)—Yeats's middle-period 'self-elegiac lyrics of transition', in Jahan Ramazani's phrase—each herald prospective changes in his style.[11] The poet in 'A Coat' trumpets that his song would strip off the 'coat / Covered with embroideries / Out of old mythologies' and '[walk] naked' (320). The ten-line poem declares a departure from the style of the poet as dressmaker and embroiderer for another which shows 'more enterprise' (320). Yeats had earlier claimed in his 1892 poem 'To Ireland in the Coming Times' (*The Countess Kathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics*, 1892 [Wade 6]) that '*the red-rose-bordered hem / Of her, whose history began / Before God made the angelic clan, / Trails all about the written page*' (137–38).[12] In his 1899 piece, 'He wishes for the Cloths of Heaven' (*The Wind Among the Reeds*, 1899 [Wade 27]), Yeats had used the metaphor of weaving 'the heavens' embroidered cloths' with '[his] dreams'

(176).[13] In 'Adam's Curse' (*In the Seven Woods*, 1903 [Wade 49]) where a 'line' of poetry is represented in terms of needlework, a poet's work of 'stitching and unstitching' is juxtaposed with the contrasting images of labour ('go down upon your marrow-bones / And scrub a kitchen pavement, or break stones', 204), half prefiguring the transition from textile to stone in Yeats's poetry.

In 'The Fisherman' a specific and quite different kind of textile—'grey Connemara cloth' (348)—synecdochically represents a new figure in his poetry: 'This wise and simple man' (347).[14] The poem also creates a symbolic spot—'a grey place on a hill', 'Where stone is dark under froth'—to which the imagined man climbs up (347–48). Written in 'alternately' 'rhyming iambic trimeter', a form Helen Vendler points out that had 'no distinguished history in English verse before Yeats', the poem addresses a transitional stage of his poetry and closes with a cry of resolution to write the man ('who is but a dream') 'one / Poem maybe as cold / And passionate as the dawn' (348).[15] About a decade later, as he had declared ('Before I am old'), Yeats would write 'The Tower', casting Part III, where appear 'upstanding men' (414) as his chosen heirs, in the same form as 'The Fisherman'.

Regarding the writing of a place, particularly a building, Yeats had addressed culturally significant buildings a few years before 'The Fisherman': the house at Coole and the Municipal Gallery. He represented them as a place 'To breed the lidless eye that loves the sun' (264)[16] or 'an eagle's nest' (288).[17] The unnamed Coole Park in the closing rhymes of *Responsibilities*—'*under that ancient roof / A sterner conscience and a friendlier home*' (321)—pre-echoes, in hindsight, Yeats's more consciously architectural poetics rooted in the neighbouring territory of Ballylee, which he was to launch in a few years.[18]

It was nearly two decades after he first set eyes on the building at Ballylee that it figured in the drafts of 'Ego Dominus Tuus' in late 1915. This emergence of the 'image' in his poetry marked the beginning of Yeats's tower construction. The following sections will provide a chronological overview of Yeats's tower project—including his encounter with, acquisition of and periods of residence at Ballylee Castle as well as the relationship between the project and the Easter Rising—to lay the foundations of deeper explorations in subsequent chapters.

'The Old Square Castle, Ballylee'

Yeats first went to Ballylee, County Galway probably in August 1896.[19] He was taken to visit Coole Park for the first time around 10 August, while staying as a guest of Edward Martyn at nearby Tillyra Castle with Arthur Symons.[20] They were on their tour in the West of Ireland, including the Aran Islands and Sligo, from which Yeats was intending to gather 'local colour' for *The Speckled Bird*—an autobiographical novel he would work on from 1896 to 1902 but which would eventually remain unpublished.[21] In the following summer of 1897 Yeats made his first long visit to Coole, which he would commemorate in 'The Wild Swans at Coole' two decades later. During this stay, as he would recollect much later, 'Lady Gregory brought me from cottage to cottage collecting folk-lore' and 'wrote out what we had heard in the dialect of the cottages'.[22] It was in the opening passage of his 1899 landmark essay on the blind Gaelic itinerant poet Anthony Raftery and his muse Mary Hynes that Yeats first registered the tower at Ballylee in his published work:

> There is the old square castle, Ballylee … and a cottage … and a little mill … and old ash-trees throwing green shadows upon a little river and great stepping-stones. ('"Dust hath closed Helen's Eye"')[23]

Writing another article, 'The Literary Movement in Ireland', for *The North American Review* (December 1899) at Coole in July, Yeats explained: 'There is a square stone tower called Ballylee Castle, a couple of miles from where I am writing.'[24] The tower, in connection with Raftery and Mary Hynes, also entered *The Speckled Bird*.[25] It is striking that Yeats immediately made the particular architecture at Ballylee serve as a dwelling place of his imagination—but he also had 'his dream of owning Ballylee' and later made that dream come true.[26] Most significantly, Yeats would transform the tower into a habitable aesthetic property of his own.

Nearly two decades after his first visit there came up the possibility of his owning Ballylee, which marked a turning point in Yeats's relationship with the place. In January 1915 Lady Gregory suggested to Yeats that he might buy Ballylee Castle; it was on the Gregory estate, part of which was 'being sold off' 'since the Land Purchase Acts and the crisis of the war'.[27] 'I am quite serious about Ballylee (though I should want to see it again now the trees are gone); but I cannot bid for it now', replied Yeats to Gregory on 29 January, writing from Stone Cottage, Sussex—where he

spent three winters of fruitful collaboration with Ezra Pound from 1913 to 1916.[28] In early 1915 purchasing Ballylee was not yet realistic for Yeats, still a bachelor: 'If I remain unmarried I would find it useless (I am too blind for the country alone & too fond of company) & it would use up the money my father or sister may need, & remain empty' (*CL InteLex* 2592). But he also asked Gregory, 'Can you put it in the government's care? … & that I suppose would leave it still to be got' (*CL InteLex* 2592). Since the summer of 1914 Yeats had been engaged in two essays and notes for Lady Gregory's *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland* (1920).[29] In one of the notes to the book Yeats referred to Raftery ('Raftery praised her in lines quoted in my *Celtic Twilight* …'), and one of the two essays, 'Swedenborg, Mediums and the Desolate Places' (dated 14th October, 1914), which he began by explaining 'Some fifteen years ago I was in bad health and could not work, and Lady Gregory brought me from cottage to cottage while she began to collect the stories in this book', was not unrelated to his interest in Japanese Noh drama inspired by Ezra Pound 'editing the late Professor Fenollosa's translations' (*CW5* 47, 69, 73, 287). Combined with this work for Gregory's 'third book of folk-lore' she had been working on 'since the turn of the century', which revived his memories of the beginning of their friendship and collaborative folklore collection,[30] the improved prospects of owning Ballylee Castle—if not immediately—probably inspired and triggered his tower project, whose grand design was to unfold gradually over the next decade. The project began before Yeats actually became the owner of the property.

With regard to 'the money my father … may need' (*CL InteLex 2592*), Yeats made a significant financial arrangement, through Lady Gregory, with John Quinn, a New York lawyer and art collector, in the spring of 1915.[31] They agreed that Yeats would pay 'in manuscripts' for the regular financial support Quinn would provide to his father John Butler Yeats, who had been living in New York since the end of 1907 and who would depend heavily on this.[32] Yeats's correspondence with Quinn thereafter, as a result, would serve, in part, as his periodic reports on the progress of his work. This agreement laid the foundations not only of the funding for J. B. Yeats but also of John Quinn's extraordinary collection of Yeats's works, including the manuscripts of *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1919).[33]

The idea of acquiring Ballylee inevitably made marriage a more pressing question for Yeats.[34] His plans for marrying Georgie Hyde-Lees probably developed in parallel with his fantasy of owning Ballylee, as what he wrote to his fiancée in early October 1917, a fortnight before marriage, may

suggest: 'at first you were but a plan & a dream & then you became a real woman, & then all in a moment that real woman became very dear.'[35] Sponsored by Yeats, Georgie had been formally admitted to the Order of the Golden Dawn on 24 July 1914,[36] and Yeats 'may have discussed marriage' with her on 22 November 1915.[37] Significantly, this nearly coincides with the composition of his first tower-oriented poem ('Ego Dominus Tuus') in December 1915, although their marriage had to wait until after his unsuccessful proposals to Maud Gonne (on 1 July 1916) and then to her daughter Iseult (around 12 August 1916 and on 7 August 1917).[38] It is also remarkable that Yeats visited 'the Tuckers and Georgie Hyde-Lees' on 18 March 1917, which was shortly before his writing to the Congested Districts Board about his acceptance of their offer of 'Ballylee Castle for £35 Cash'.[39]

Writing to Joseph Hone on 2 January 1916, Yeats described his work as building his 'house'. In the letter to thank Hone for the biography *William Butler Yeats. The Poet in Contemporary Ireland*, Yeats explained the state of progress of his oeuvre in architectural terms: 'Your difficulties have come from my house being still unfinished, there are so many rooms and corridors that I am still building upon foundations laid long ago' (*CL InteLex* 2842).[40] It was not long after his composition of 'Ego Dominus Tuus' and he was now beginning to construct the tower in his poetry 'upon foundations laid long ago'—by himself as well as by his precursors. With the transfer of his books from A. H. Bullen to Macmillan underway around that time, Yeats also added, 'I am making some alterations in my publishing schemes and hope to make my work as a whole accessible.'[41]

In early 1916, Yeats was engaged in writing and rehearsing *At the Hawk's Well*, restarting his Cuchulain cycle as the first of his Noh-inspired plays.[42] It was a transformative dramatic enterprise, which involved 'quarrying the stone for one's statue' from 'Japanese plays "translated by Ernest Fenollosa and finished by Ezra Pound"'.[43] Yeats had referred to the treatment of ghosts in some Japanese Noh plays in his above-mentioned 1914 essay 'Swedenborg, Mediums, and the Desolate Places' for Lady Gregory's *Visions and Beliefs* (*CW5* 69–71). Writing the introduction to Ezra Pound's *Certain Noble Plays of Japan: From the Manuscripts of Ernest Fenollosa, Chosen and Finished by Ezra Pound, With an Introduction by William Butler Yeats* (Cuala Press, 1916 [Wade 269]) in April 1916, Yeats mentions 'an ambition of helping to bring again to certain places their old sanctity or their romance', which he says 'I had to put away' 'when I first began to write poetical plays for an Irish theatre'.[44] Regretting his failing,

unlike Noh plays' conventional opening, 'to call up the shallow river and the few trees and rocky fields of modern Gort' in *The King's Threshold* (*CW4* 171), Yeats almost conjures up the location of his germinating tower project. Yeats's Noh-inspired theatrical project and his tower project, launched around the same period, were both motivated by that 'ambition' and were connected to each other at their root.

Indeed, preserved drafts in prose and verse of an untitled and unfinished play indicate that Yeats did attempt to write a Noh-inspired play, set around the tower and the 'flooded' river—probably beginning the work in prose in 1918 and then in verse in 1923.[45] The setting was probably modelled on a combination of 'Ballylee and other Galway places' (Dunguaire Castle and Renvyle House), as Wayne K. Chapman suggests,[46] and also possibly the Burren. The play, which George Yeats later called 'a summary of the events of 1918',[47] remained unfinished and without a title, probably for multiple reasons, including the impact of the award of the Nobel Prize in 1923 on his work schedule as well as 'personal diplomacy'.[48] Nevertheless, the manuscripts of the play seem to have served as a reservoir of strands of motifs and images informed by the possession of Ballylee and marriage (old age and youth; dreaming and talking in sleep; storms and floods), eventually feeding into his poems, including tower-oriented pieces, as we will see in subsequent chapters.[49]

About a week after the productions of *At the Hawk's Well* in the drawing-rooms in London on 2 and 4 April 1916, Yeats mentioned the intention of following it with *The Only Jealousy of Emer*.[50] However, with the historic event in late April 1916 inspiring another subject for his second Noh-modelled play, it was not until after his marriage in the following year that Yeats began to work on his next Cuchulain play.[51] Yeats started *The Dreaming of the Bones* instead, probably setting about the work in Dublin in November 1916, writing it in the summer of 1917 and rewriting in the following summer.[52] The writing and rewriting of the play were roughly contemporary with Yeats's making the two volumes of *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1917, 1919) and were related to the tower project at root.

After setting the play near Dublin and Howth at the time of the battle 'at Vinegar Hill' during the 1798 Rebellion in the first draft in prose,[53] Yeats in subsequent drafts moved the setting, though it is difficult to date the revision, to the west of Ireland around the Burren, closer to his tower, and to the time after 'the late rising'.[54] On 11 June 1917 Yeats wrote about the play to Lady Gregory from London (*CL InteLex* 3260): 'I have almost finished my Dervogilla play I think the best play I have written for

years. It has grown greatly since you saw it & is I am afraid only too powerful politically. I have nothing now to write but the lyrics & must leave London for that.' Writing to Olivia Shakespear from Coole the following month on 10 July (*CL InteLex* 3284), Yeats connected the location of his tower project and the setting of the play, about which he had written two months earlier ('started another play in the manner of "The Hawks Well"' [*CL InteLex* 3243]): 'While here I shall start the building at the Castle & walk over a mountain side where I have laid the scene of a new play. I saw my architect in Dublin & he wants to begin at once on the Castle & leave the cottage until later.'[55]

In writing *The Dreaming of the Bones* Yeats was particularly conscious of 'bring[ing] again to certain places their old sanctity or their romance' (*CW4* 171) in his words in the introduction to *Certain Noble Plays of Japan* quoted above. In the play which constructs 'a place of terrible temptation'[56] and abounds in place names and descriptions of local places, including references to architecture, Yeats makes the 'Young Man' use the word 'sanctity' itself, suggesting the significance of the conservation of 'ancient' buildings: 'Is there no house / Famous for sanctity or architectural beauty / In Clare or Kerry, or in all wide Connacht, / The enemy has not unroofed?'[57] Moreover, towards the end of the play, Yeats makes the 'Yong Man', overseeing from the summit of the hill 'The Aran Islands, Connemara Hills, / And Galway in the breaking light', condemn the destruction of the old beauty of Ireland: 'The enemy has toppled roof and gable, / And torn the panelling from ancient rooms'.[58]

'Begin Building Again'

On 24 April 1916, about a fortnight after the first performances of *At the Hawk's Well*, the Easter Rising broke out in Dublin, and this unpredicted political upheaval was to catalyse Yeats's tower project. Preserved letters, written deeply conscious of their own historical importance, record some of his early reactions.[59] On 11 May, shortly after the executions of the leaders of the Rising, Yeats wrote to Lady Gregory that he was 'trying to write a poem on the men executed; "terrible beauty has been born again"' (*CL InteLex* 2950). It was the first poem Yeats worked on after the event. The draft refrain partly resonates with Maud Gonne's comment ('They have raised the Irish cause again to a position of tragic dignity') which Yeats mentions in the same letter,[60] as well as remotely echoing 'a terrible joy', used by the protagonist Paul Ruttledge about Jesus Christ in *Where*

There is Nothing (*VPl* 1140). On 21 May, dissuading Maud Gonne from going to Dublin at that moment, Yeats wrote, 'When it [the aftermath] is over there will be a new Ireland to build up' (*CL InteLex* 2958). The Rising gave new urgency to the notion of 'building'. In the letter to John Quinn two days later, which was censored, Yeats expressed his remorse ('We have lost the ablest & most fine natured of our young men … I keep going over the past in my mind & wonder if I could have done anything to turn these young men in some other direction') and continued: 'At the moment I feal as if I shall return to Dublin to live, to begin building again.'[61] Yeats closed the letter with his plans of poetic construction ('planning a group of poems on the Dublin rising but cannot write till I get into the country'). During his visit to Dublin in early June, Yeats probably saw that the 'beauty' had actually been born: 'Dublin cynicism had passed away and was inventing beautiful, instead of derisive, fables.'[62]

Instead of immediately 'return[ing] to Dublin to live' (which he would do in 1922), however, Yeats went to Colleville, Normandy in late June and stayed with the Gonnes for two months.[63] The Rising made the Gonnes intervene, though temporarily, in Yeats's future plans at this critical turning point. Iseult Gonne, whose growth reminded Yeats of his 'beginning to be old', visited London on 16 May 'to ask me to return with her to Paris' for her mother.[64] Yeats's remark at the end of the month, 'It is curious how all about one seems to be breaking or changing', conveys his sense of an ending and a new beginning.[65] The execution of John MacBride for his part in the Rising led to Yeats's final unsuccessful marriage proposal to now-widowed Maud Gonne at the beginning of July.[66] Shortly before leaving London for France, Yeats wrote to Gregory, 'I should not marry unless Maud Gonne gave up all politics including Amnesty … As I grow older impulse declines.'[67] Maud's final refusal—after which Yeats would discuss marriage with Iseult in mid-August and would be declined[68]—resulted in marking the 'ending of a phase in his relationship with his "phoenix"', both personally and poetically.[69] It marked the ending of the poet's role as his muse's 'stubborn' ('Broken Dreams' [356]) suitor. During this stay at Colleville, from the vantage of having confirmed the ending, Yeats worked on his memoirs of the years 'from the close of "reveries" to about 1900'.[70] The memoirs would eventually close with a crucial stage of his doomed relationship with Maud Gonne, and Yeats would grapple with the subject in verse later in Part II of 'The Tower'.[71]

'I had been a little puzzled by your apparent indifference to Ireland after your excitement about the Rising', wrote Lady Gregory to Yeats on

20 August.[72] She also used the word 'building': 'I believe there is a great deal you can do, all is unrest and is discontent, there is nowhere for the imagination to rest; but there must be some spiritual building possible just as after Parnell's fall, but perhaps more intense….' Gregory suggested, if half ironically, 'your being away & having time for thought & your thinking of the '98 time may be all a help in the end'. Indeed, the summer in France must have served to 'purify my own imagination by setting the past in order' (*CL InteLex* 3012) before his post-Rising construction.

Returning to London at the end of August 1916, Yeats went to Dublin in mid-September and then to Coole, where he stayed until early October. When the enlarged Macmillan edition of *Responsibilities and Other Poems* (Wade 115) was published on 10 October, Yeats had added a paragraph (dated 'July 1916') to the end of his notes on the poems concerning the Municipal Gallery controversy, which may sound as if it were a prose subject for 'Easter, 1916':[73] '"Romantic Ireland's dead and gone" sounds old-fashioned now. It seemed true in 1913, but I did not foresee 1916. The late Dublin Rebellion, whatever one can say of its wisdom, will long be remembered for its heroism. "They weighed so lightly what they gave", and gave too in some cases without hope of success' (*VP* 820). This paragraph, which served as one of his earliest public comments on the Rising, was printed only in this edition, probably becoming redundant after the publication of the poem itself. At the time of his writing the paragraph, 'dead and gone' (289–90) in the refrain of 'September 1913' was being changed to 'born' (392–94) in that of his ongoing unpublished elegy.[74]

Yeats finished 'Easter, 1916' during his first stay at Coole after the Rising, inscribing its ink draft with the date 'Sept. 25. 1916'; a week later, he was composing a self-elegy, 'The Wild Swans at Coole', and launched his negotiations—though still partnerless—for the purchase of Ballylee Castle.[75] For Yeats, who felt in early May that 'all the work of years has been overturned' by the Rebellion—'all the bringing together of classes, all the freeing of Irish literature & criticism from politics'—constructing the tower on the foundations of ruins was a way of restoring his poetry.[76] The third stanza of 'Easter, 1916', where figures 'the living stream' of those which 'change' and 'live' 'Minute by minute', including 'long-legged moor-hens', diving and calling to 'moor-cocks' (393)—in contrast to the ultimate change of the martyrs—may have been implicitly built around the river by the tower at Ballylee. A 'water-hen' (326) would eventually inhabit a territory around Yeats's tower. The 'stone / To trouble the living stream' which is 'in the midst of all' (393) served as a catalyst for the

tower project and a cornerstone of Yeats's tower.[77] The event impelled him to 'begin building again'.

In the letter of 2 October 1916 sent from Coole to William F. Bailey (whose extract was forwarded to 'Sir Henry Doran, Land Commission') declared Yeats: 'For years I have coveted Ballylee Castle … I could restore it to some of its original stern beauty.'[78] What Lady Gregory commented to Prime Minister Herbert Asquith over a lunch at 10 Downing Street in November 1916 encapsulates a symbolic significance Yeats's tower project might have: 'Yeats [is] showing his confidence in the stability of Ireland by buying a castle'.[79] The Easter Rising, the finale of his courtship of Maud Gonne and the prospect of restoring the tower—which also implied his independence from Coole and marriage—together occupied Yeats's mind in the autumn of 1916.

Leaving Coole on 6 October, Yeats worked in London on 'a final text' of *At the Hawk's Well* for publication and an 'introductory essay' for the play as well as lobbying to bring the modern French paintings bequeathed by Hugh Lane back to Dublin.[80] Staying in Dublin in November, Yeats seems to have begun his next Noh-oriented play, *The Dreaming of the Bones*, as mentioned above, as well as preparing for the purchase of Ballylee Castle.[81] Several days after going over to Ballylee, together with Margaret Gregory and 'a local builder' 'Raftery' 'to arrange "the exact boundaries"' with an inspector from the Congested Districts Board, Yeats saw in Dublin the architect William A. Scott, 'to whom [Edward] Martyn has given me an introduction'.[82]

After the negotiations with the Congested Districts Board, which was redistributing 'the properties relinquished by the [Gregory] estate', about the 'boundaries and price', Yeats agreed on the purchase of Ballylee Castle on 27 March 1917.[83] About half a year later, 'Ego Dominus Tuus', his first tower-related poem, was published in *Poetry* (Chicago), October 1917. Strikingly, Yeats had revised the setting of the tower from by the 'sea' to by the 'stream', probably reflecting the location of the actual building he had by then obtained, which will be examined in more detail in Chap. 2.[84] Yeats's textual construction of his new architectural image would progress in tandem, especially in the early stages, with the renovation of the actual stone tower, which was charged with metaphors for poetic building and proceeded slowly during the time of consecutive wars.

Thoor Ballylee

Yeats commissioned William Scott, a Dublin professor and architect, renowned for his Arts and Crafts expertise and renovations, to design Ballylee Castle for its restoration.[85] Yeats was at Coole from late April to late May 1917, 'looking after my Castle chiefly'.[86] The letter of 15 May 1917, the day before the handover of the property to him, shows his clear ideas and confidence about the reconstruction (*CL InteLex* 3243): 'The architect has been down & I know what I am going to do … My idea is to keep the contrast between the medieval castle & the peasants cottage. As I shall have the necessities in the cottages I can devote the castle to a couple of great rooms & for very little money.' Yeats was also at Coole in mid-July (before making yet another unsuccessful marriage proposal to Iseult Gonne in France in August) and in early October (after finally visiting Mrs Tucker and proposing to her daughter Georgie in September).[87]

On 20 October 1917 Yeats married Georgie Hyde-Lees, who would decide to call herself George by 25 November.[88] *The Wild Swans at Coole, Other Verses and a Play in Verse* (Wade 118), which included *At the Hawk's Well* as well as 'Ego Dominus Tuus', was published on 17 November 1917. George Yeats started her automatic writing soon after their marriage and the building of what would eventually become *A Vision* (1925 [Wade 149], 1937 [Wade 191]) progressed in parallel with that of the tower.[89] Even before her first visit to Ballylee in April 1918, George contributed to the tower project, not only by conducting 'regular correspondence with the local builder, Michael Rafferty of Glenbrack, Gort', begun by late November 1917, but also by conjuring up the symbolic potential of the tower in the automatic writing sessions in 1918.[90]

Yeats may have started drawing up his symbolic plans for the tower during his visits to Coole and Ballylee in April, May, July and October 1917. His making a rough sketch of his textual tower at this stage may have been partly inspired by the architect Scott's finishing the plans for Ballylee around mid-May 1917.[91] An unfinished draft of a dialogue between 'WB Yeats' and Owen Aherne, headed 'Anglo Ireland. / a conversation' and possibly written around November 1917, records Yeats's argument on the rationale for his deliberate choice of the tower as his symbol.[92] In a passage concerning 'the importance of Emblems', which is crossed out in the draft, Yeats as dialogist refers to 'a piece of stone from the tower, of thatch from the cottage / & of earth from the garden', which connects Yeats's textual tower with the actual one and also suggests the passage was written

after he received the physical symbols of possession in June 1917.[93] In that cancelled speech 'WB Yeats' also declares 'I have so sung & shall so sing ~~This~~ / ~~tower~~ that young men ~~with~~ that young men / will remember ~~me & my~~ my tower & ~~myself~~ me together' and announces a shift in his poetry from 'love' to 'wisdom' ('I ~~sung enough~~ sang love / ~~of love songs~~ long enough, ~~& so~~ now I must sing wisdom')—in parallel with his departure from Maud Gonne and Iseult Gonne to his marriage and esoteric study with George.[94] Written prior to his composition of 'The Phases of the Moon' in 1918, this unfinished draft of a dialogue may have served as a sort of a 'Subject for poem', as in the case of the one he wrote before composing 'The Fisherman'.[95] The draft was packed with the features (in embryo) of the tower Yeats would eventually textually construct—not only with 'The Phases of the Moon' but also with 'Meditations in Time of Civil War' and subsequent tower-oriented sequences.

The writing of *The Dreaming of the Bones*, whose complete holograph draft in verse is dated 'August 1917' and would be revised in the summer of 1918,[96] was also deeply related to the historical meditations in the unfinished Yeats-Aherne dialogue. The play, which traces the cause of the Easter Rising back to 'the twelfth-century Norman invasion',[97] can be understood as part of preparation for his tower project. The connection of the play and the tower project at Ballylee was highlighted by the transposition of the play's setting from the hills near Dublin and Howth to the unnamed Burren and the 'Clare-Galway' region after the first prose draft.[98]

From May to September 1918 the Yeatses stayed at Ballinamantane House on the Coole estate the Gregorys lent them 'till Ballylee Castle is ready', supervising the rebuilding work and waiting to move in.[99] In April 1918, more than two years after the composition of 'Ego Dominus Tuus', Yeats wrote his second tower-related poem 'A Prayer on going into my House' at Coole—following it with 'In Memory of Major Robert Gregory' in May and June and 'The Phases of the Moon' in July, both at Ballinamantane House. Significantly, it may have also been around this time that Yeats began writing the above-mentioned (eventually unfinished) tower-oriented Noh play set around the tower and the river.[100] All his tower-related poems (except for 'Two Songs of a Fool') in *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1919) were written before they moved into Ballylee. Yeats's poetic construction of the tower in the early stages was anticipatory and Chap. 2 addresses this period.

It was also around this time that Yeats quoted in his letter to John Quinn in New York the early unpublished version of the lines to be

'inscribed … [o]n a great stone beside the front door' of the tower.[101] Yeats used the new postal address 'Ballylee Castle / Gort / Co Galway / Ireland' on this occasion (before their actual move-in), which represented a crucial step towards creating his own place. The 'process by which this postal address becomes a poetic symbol', as Seamus Heaney put it, will be observed in the following chapters.[102] The Yeatses finally moved into the cottage quarters at Ballylee presumably on 19 September 1918 and stayed there for a short time—with 'the Castle' yet to be 'roofed & floored'.[103] During this first stay Yeats probably wrote 'Two Songs of a Fool', and sessions of automatic writing were held from 21 to 23 September.[104]

The Yeatses' next—and first extended—stay at Ballylee was from mid-June to mid-September 1919. With their first child Anne born on 27 February 1919, Yeats had begun 'A Prayer for My Daughter' in Dublin by 1 April and probably finished it at Ballylee.[105] Following the sweeping victory of Sinn Féin in the elections in December the previous year, the Dáil had 'declared that Ireland had seceded from the Union' in January 1919, which led to the Anglo-Irish War.[106] It continued in the form of '"incidents" against policemen and security forces escalat[ing] into a guerrilla war', followed by 'Black and Tan atrocities' in 1920.[107] From October 1919 to mid-March 1922, the Yeatses were primarily based in their rented house at 4 Broad Street, Oxford, except for the period of his American lecture tour (from mid-January to the end of May 1920)—after which they might have gone to Japan, had he accepted the offer of a two-year lectureship in English literature at a university in Tokyo—and the period when they spent in Shillingford, Berkshire and Thame, Oxfordshire (from early April to mid-September 1921), letting their house at 4 Broad Street to save money.[108] Chapter 3 examines the tower construction at the stage of *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (Cuala Press, 1921 [Wade 127]), which progressed slowly and unpredictably, both textually and architecturally, over this period of political tension.

A truce of the Anglo-Irish War was declared on 11 July 1921 and the ratification of the Anglo-Irish Treaty by the Dáil on 7 January 1922 created the Irish Free State, whose government Yeats was interested in helping.[109] It led to the Irish Civil War raging from 1922—especially from June—to 1923.[110] It was under these circumstances that the Yeatses moved out of England in the spring of 1922 to spend the whole year in Ireland—in Galway and in Dublin. Yeats wrote to Harriet Monroe in Chicago on 30 March 1922, 'as we have taken a house in Dublin—82 Merrion Square—I am not likely to leave Ireland again except for brief travel.

Whether I have come home to civil war or country quiet I cannot yet know' (*CL InteLex* 4110).

In this letter of 30 March 1922 Yeats first used the new name of his own invention for his property as the postal address—again ahead of time, actually moving from Coole to Ballylee about a week later.[111] Yeats had by now renamed his tower Thoor Ballylee—with 'Thoor' meaning a tower, originating from the Irish '*tor, tur*'[112]—as if to mark the creation of the Irish Free State and symbolically fortify the nation against destruction by the Civil War. The bedroom in the tower was finally ready on their return to Ballylee after a two-and-a-half-year interval. Yeats wrote his first tower-oriented sequence, 'Meditations in Time of Civil War', during this longest stay from early April to late September 1922. Chapter 4 explores this stage of construction.

After six months at Ballylee, the Yeatses moved into their new house at 82 Merrion Square, Dublin (which they had bought in February) in late September 1922.[113] Living closer to actual violence of the Civil War, he wrote, 'We are entering on the final & more dreadful stage' (9 October [1922], *CL InteLex* 4184). Yeats became a member of the Irish Senate in December 1922 as 'one of three Senators appointed to advise the government on matters concerning education, literature, and the arts'; he would serve as a Senator for six years during the first and second triennial periods until late 1928.[114] In mid-November 1923 Yeats was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.[115] It was in 1925 that the Yeatses next returned to Ballylee on a long-term basis, and during this stay Yeats worked on 'The Tower', which Chap. 5 examines.[116] Reprinting the essay '"Dust hath closed Helen's Eye"' in *Early Poems and Stories* (the fifth volume of Macmillan's *Collected Edition of the Works*), published in September 1925 (Wade 147), Yeats proclaimed his ownership of 'the old square castle, Ballylee', appending a footnote dated '1924': 'Ballylee Castle, or Thoor Ballylee, as I have named it to escape from the too magnificent word "castle", is now my property'.[117]

From May to September 1926 Yeats went back and forth between Dublin and Ballylee, and in 1927 he was based at Ballylee from mid-July until 26 August.[118] This turned out to be Yeats's final long stay there, during which he finished 'Blood and the Moon', the last tower poem written at Ballylee. It was in Dublin in late September 1927 that Yeats, having sent Macmillan the manuscript of *The Tower* five days earlier, wrote to Sturge Moore, who was working on the book's cover design: 'I like to think of that building as a permanent symbol of my work plainly visible to the