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Essays in Honour of  
**Dan Izevbaye**

Edited by  
Aderemi Raji-Oyelade & Oyeniya Okunoye



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Aderemi Raji-Oyelade

Oyeniya Okunoye

**BOOKCRAFT**

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First published in Nigeria, 2008

© Raji-Oyelade & Okunoye, 2008

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ISBN: 978-2030-70-8

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## The Hero in Yeatsian Dramaturgy\*

Dele LAYIWOLA

I had an unshakable conviction, arising how or whence I cannot tell, that invisible gates would open as they opened for Blake, as they opened for Swedenborg, as they opened for Boehme, and that this philosophy would find its manuals of devotion in all imaginative literature, and set before Irish men for special manual an Irish literature *which though made by many minds would seem like the work of a single mind*, and turn our places of beauty or legendary association into holy symbols. I did not think this philosophy would be altogether pagan, for it was plain that its symbols must be selected from all those things that had moved men most during many, mainly Christian centuries. (Yeats 1926: 314 – 315; my emphasis)

Yeats' preoccupation with the destiny of a society and with the oversoul of the individual makes him a millenarian. The style of his dramas, in matching the loftiness of his thoughts and his mythic invocation of history, is always epical in scope. Yeats's own aim of creating a "unity of being" and a "unity of culture" for Ireland is well recollected in his *Autobiographies* (1926), from which the above citation is taken. In creating a national literature, Yeats was faced with the task, not only of recreating the past but also of constructing a future. The task of creating a national literature entails the conception of national heroes, national bards or griots, epitomising the heroic qualities of the nation; heroes and heroines who stand for national ideals and conscience in the scheme of historic periodisation. The transposition of folk and historic heroes into art is not always an easy one. Sometimes the heroes are too large for their roles

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\* A version of this essay was presented at the conference of the International Association for the Study of Anglo-Irish Literature, Hofstra University, Hempstead, New York, July 17–20, 1996.

whilst at other times they are too little to match the artistic or visionary mould. The degree to which heroes in selected plays of W.B. Yeats could speak for the 'we' of oral, communal literature and epic traditions will therefore be contrasted with the 'I' of written literatures in the service of a modern nation. That is the way in which the work "made by many minds would seem the work of a single mind." This essay examines the extent to which vision fulfils or betrays the structure of its craft or its own vehicle.

Yeats's predilection for drawing larger than life heroes and heroines astride of two traditions – Folk and Christian – sometimes evokes a dilemma in identity or cultural study. The dilemma appears thus: in his or her material vision of life, death and resurrection, should the hero(ine) project him/herself or should he project his society? It is clear, as we affirmed above, that quest and fulfillment in literatures of epical dimensions often reveal heroes and heroines taking over the dream or ideal of their societies, fulfilling or betraying them in the process. It would be interesting to take on selected events in Yeats's plays and examine them as such. In so doing, this paper, on the one hand, problematises the Yeatsian portrayal of the hero seeking to show the point at which he/she conflates the 'I' with the collective 'we' of the national identity. On the other hand, the paper asks whether Yeats's apocalyptic images resolve the identity problems between a hero(ine) and his/her larger community. The paper concludes that this problem remains partly unresolved in *The Countess Cathleen* (1892); *On Baile's Strand* (1904); and *The Shadowy Waters* (1911).

The story of Countess Cathleen, like that of Joan of Arc, is that of a legendary female who undergoes immolation on account of her society. The immediate source of the story is from Leo Lespes' *Les Matinees de Timothe Trimm* (1865) but Yeats himself has identified parallels from two other sources. The first is Larminie's *West Irish Folktales and Romances* and the second is the Greek story of Alcestis. This is how he identifies these parallel sources:

Leo Lespes gives it an Irish story, and though the editor of *Folklore* has kindly advertised for information, the only Christian variant I know is a Donegal tale, given by Mr. Larminie in his *West Irish Folktales and Romances*, of a woman who goes to hell for ten years to save her husband, and stays there another ten, having been granted permission to carry

away as many souls as could cling to her skirt. Leo Lespes may have added a few details, but I have no doubt of the essential antiquity of what seems to me the most impressive form of one of the supreme parables of the world. The parables came to the Greeks in the sacrifice of Alcestis, but her sacrifice was less overwhelming, less apparently irremediable. (1966:170)

I have quoted Yeats's observation at length to enable me bring out another subtle point of reference: that of the Christian as opposed to a folk or pagan tradition. There is a sense in which the personal dilemma of a public spirited heroine as exemplified in the extent of her duty to herself, on the one hand, and to her society on the other translates into a historical conflict between two ages: the Celtic and the Christian. Richard Taylor has seized, to considerable effect, on this latter implication and expatiates on it thus:

The plot is a simple story of Christian piety and the triumph of charity in a straight contest with the forces of evil. During a famine the devil contrives to remove all possibility of alleviating the people's suffering. His followers, disguised as merchants, offer to buy souls, but the countess sells her own to ransom theirs. In every revision, however, Yeats enlarged upon the theme as well as the significance of the action by insisting on wider and more detailed symbolism.... Aleel is the only character in the play that speaks of the old gods of pre-Christian Ireland and he is fully associated with their subjective, heroic and creative attributes. Through repeated references to the classical mythology of the Celtic peoples and Cathleen's obsessive Christianity, we begin to see that the basic conflict of the drama includes the opposition of the two historical ages. (Taylor, 1984: 24, 26)

Underneath the superstructure of contending philosophies, however, looms the shadow and the fallout from the great famine of 1845-1848 (see Kinealy, 1995; Welch, 1996:179). The failure of potato, the Irish staple, and the consequent demise and emigration of populations caused great despair, which had long-term demographic and political implications. A general sense of insecurity and unease as accompanies times of economic depression opens the play where Mary and her son, Teigue, discuss that Ghosts parade the land and imagined events take over the reality of everyday living. For instance, there were reports of persons with sense organs missing and owls with horns and human faces. Such frightful superstition logically evokes Christian prayers to God and to Mary, the Mother of God. This point recurs at other points in the play



especially when Oona, Cathleen's foster mother, consistently identifies Aleel, the griot as a peddler of pagan tales and as a heathen:

Talk on; what does it matter what you say,  
For you have not been christened –  
How does a man who never was baptized  
Know what Heaven pardons? (1966:59)

The potential conflict is elaborated on two levels, for as we indicated earlier, the situation on ground is ripe for the arrival of a saviour – good or bad. There is a desperate situation at hand and it is dramatically reinforced by the potential martyr, Countess Cathleen. About the same time “economic saviours” in the light of two oriental merchants, disciples of an avowed master arrived on the scene offering to buy people's immaterial souls for material gain; money. Concurrently, a moral gradually unfolds between the poet/historian, Aleel, and the naïve Christian and gerontocrat, Oona. Her jibe at both Aleel and Cathleen is noteworthy:

The empty rattle-plate! Lean on this arm,  
That I can tell you is a cherished arm,  
And not like some, if we are to judge by speech. But as you please. *It is time I was forgot. Maybe it is not on this arm you slumbered. When you were as helpless as a worm.* (1966:59; my emphasis)

Whilst Aleel seeks to physically possess the Countess by alluring her interest with instances of heroic love in oral traditions, Oona dismisses his prattle and emphasises knowledge through age as a foster mother. There is no doubt that Oona's contempt for tradition is predicated on a purely moral rather than a philosophical understanding of events. In the long run she is closer to winning the heart of the heroine than Aleel, the interpreter of Celtic fable and traditions. In the original version of the play, when a herdsman reports to Countess Cathleen how people are selling their souls for money to enable them survive the famine, she laments, calling on the old heroes of Celtic Ireland:

O, I am sadder than an old air, Oona;  
My heart is longing for a deeper peace  
Than Fergus found amid his brazen cars:  
Would that like Adene my first forebear's daughter,  
Who followed once a twilight piercing tune,

I could go and dwell among the Shee  
In their old ever-busy honeyed land. (1966:60,62)

But Oona is quick to dismiss the ancient reminiscences as taboo: “You should not say such things – they bring ill luck” (1966:62). This subtle interaction of texts on either side of the folk and Christian traditions shows the extent to which the historical rivalry heightens the conflict in the psyche and personality of the heroine. She is drawn between forces over which she has only a virtual, diminishing control.

The third scene of the play encompasses the climax wherein Countess Cathleen boosts the understanding of her own mission. Her spiritual life, symbolised by the conspicuous oratory in the castle is balanced by her assertion of Christian piety. In refusing to betray her mission either by fleeing the horrors of famine or falling in love with Aleel, she reveals herself as truly noble. Given that Aleel cites a divine source for his attempt to take her away from her mission, she remains steadfast in her faith and continues to act with conviction and integrity. She holds material wealth with detachment and subordinates pleasure and riches to goals beyond the apprehension of the ordinary humanity of her period as typified by Oona and Aleel.

The distinction with which the ‘soul merchants’ and their agents, Shemus and Teigue, describe spiritual states is highly specialised. This, certainly, is not unconnected with Yeats’s involvement in mystic seances; his involvement with the spiritualist, Macgregor Mathers, and his membership of the Order of the Golden Dawn (Yeats, 1926). He gave painstaking attention to this phenomenon as his rendition of it smacks of the ancient poet he describes in his article on “The Celtic Element in Literature”. He recalls circumstantially:

And an Elizabethan poet cries: ‘Three things are waiting for my death. The Devil, who is waiting for my soul and cares nothing for my body or my wealth; the worms who are waiting for my body but care nothing for my soul or my wealth; my children, who are waiting for my wealth and care nothing for my body or my soul. O Christ, hang all three in one noose.’ (Yeats, 1961:181)

This is probably one play where the exactitude of an ascetic philosophy matches the guilelessness of an existentialist outlook. Even Yeats himself

remarks that such a dispassionate attitude is contradictory in a complementary way. He writes that “Such love and hatred seek no mortal thing but their own infinity, and such love and hatred soon become love and hatred of the idea.” (Yeats, 1961:181)

Countess Cathleen is genuine and all who meet her, including the soul merchants, instantly recognise her worth. She identifies that there is a genuine problem at hand and that she is well placed to help the peasant population. This is why she makes a case for anyone who steals food only on account of hunger and starvation. She puts her estates and material property on offer if the proceeds will save the population from perdition. She says to the agents of the Devil:

The people starve, therefore the people go  
Thronging to you. I hear a cry come from them  
And it is in my ears by night and day,  
And I would have five hundred thousand crowns  
That I may feed them till the dearth go by. (1966:149)

In the long run, Countess Cathleen does not quite succeed in raising the consciousness of the peasants she hopes to save from starvation nor do the proceeds from her estates suffice to redeem their souls. Consequently, she sells her own soul to the same agents of the devil for the material wherewithal of the peasants. In spite of the genuine motive of the heroine, her style of accomplishing her avowed mission creates a moral contradiction. For instance is there any principle involved in using every means to pursue her objective? If so does her Christian piety allow her to sell her soul to the devil and still get away with it? Could we say that the heroine in this circumstance pursues a personal or a national agendum? The playwright only partially resolves this at the end of the play by asserting that motive rather than the deed is the basis of altruism. The wizened response of the soul merchants to Cathleen’s offer of her soul is to append a caveat to their offer of ‘minted commerce’: “But you must sign, for we omit no form in buying a soul like yours.” (1966:151)

The situation above is similar to what Mephistopheles required of Dr. Faustus when the latter pawns his soul to the former: that he must do his signature in blood because that fluid “is of a most peculiar essence”. Cathleen, in spite of the religious caution and remonstrations of the historian-poet, Aleel, picks up the parchment, signs off her soul and

collects the money. The peasants who have hitherto collected money from the Devil's agent in return for their souls now mindlessly turn their predacity on the Countess, kissing her dress. Now that the Countess is in the firm grip of wanton traducianists, they await her impending death, referring to her as their precious jewel. They reassure themselves:

We need but hover over her head in the air,  
For she has only minutes. When she signed  
Her heart began to break. Hush, hush, I hear  
The brazen door of Hell moves on its hinges,  
And the eternal revelry float hither  
To hearten us. (1966:153, 155)

At such a time when the heroic Countess would seem to have upset the spiritual rules she stands for, Aleel demonstrates a heightened consciousness backed by tradition and by history as he addresses old, old Oona:

The brazen door stands wide, and Balor comes  
Borne in his heavy car, and demons have lifted  
The age-weary eyelids from the eyes that of old  
Turned gods to stone; Barach, the traitor, comes  
And the lascivious race, Cailitin,  
That cast a druid weakness and decay  
Over Sualtam's and old Dectora's child;  
And that great king Hell first took hold upon  
When he killed Naoise and broke Deidre's heart;  
And all their heads are twisted to one side,  
For when they lived they warred on beauty and peace  
With obstinate, crafty, sidelong bitterness...  
Cathleen has chosen other friends than us,  
And they are rising through the hollow world.  
Demons are out, old heron. (1966: 155, 157)

At the end of the play, the combined effect of Oona and Aleel's prayers; the persistence of Aleel in detaining one of the Angels and Cathleen's own purity of motive saves the Countess from the gates of hell. The impact of her sacrifice on the peasant community institutes a *coup de theatre*, which converts and redeems them. This does not happen without effort because Aleel reproves the peasants from a rancoured heart and a host of angelic forces had to battle to rescue the soul of Cathleen from the forces of darkness. There is a phrasal correlation in Aleel's importunity of the Angel on the Salvation of Countess Cathleen and the

earlier quotation from “The Celtic Element in Literature”: line 934 of the text says “That it may be no more with mortal things” while the quotation from the latter essay reads “such love and hatred seek no mortal thing but their own infinity”. This is very interesting because the essay was written a decade after the play but this correspondence reveals that both texts come from the same cycle of gestation. The overall ramifications of the idea underscore the recurrent unification of opposites in Yeatsian concepts. Conflict and opposition in nature (dramatic conflicts inclusive) would appear to be a stage in the resolution of contradictions in history. This relativist theory of history would serve to explain such puzzles that confound Oona, the naïve religionist – can a man be a thief and yet sinless? (1966:69)

The littoral setting for *On Baile's Strand* portends that a furious battle is in the offing. Ancient Celts are known to fight the waves in a rage and such savage rages break down the boundaries of consciousness as much as the strand is a liminal boundary between mediums or states of nature as typified by the land and the sea. The hero of the play, Cuchulain, has been tricked by Conchubar, the legendary king of the Red branch cycle of Ulster, to enter into an oath of allegiance. Once accomplished, Conchubar gains control over the military skills of Cuchulain to ensure succession for his own sons. In the same play, Cuchulain unwittingly slays his own son who challenges the province of Ulster to battle on account of his oath of loyalty to the king. Apart from the fact that the hero's intuitive ability is called into question in the play, a dramatic foil is set against Conchubar and Cuchulain in the persons of a blind man and a fool, respectively. There is a sense in which the antics and cunning of Conchubar over Cuchulain is matched by those of the blind man over the fool. For instance Conchubar robs Cuchulain of political power, highlighting him as a man ruled more by brawn than by brain. In like manner, the blind man continually robs the fool of all initiative and honour. Though blind, he will tell the fool where and how to pilfer food. He offers to dress the chicken and whilst the fool is still busy running his designed errands, he will consume the chicken and leave him the bones! The outrageous irony is that he still manages to keep the loyalty of the fool. Two crucial statements uttered by the fool in the opening scene reveals that he, an anti-hero, has set out to satirize the great hero, Cuchulain. He says, in part, to the Blind Man in rather prosaic fashion:

...And what a good cook you are! You take the fowl out of my hands after I have stolen it and plucked it, and you put it into the big pot at the fire there, and I can go out and run races with witches at the edge of the waves and get an appetite, and when I have got it, there's the hen waiting inside for me, done to the turn. (1966:459 – 61)

Who else but Cuchulain, haunted by witches, kills his own son and fought at the edge of the waves! Or this other passage that follows to the sequence:

Don't tell it to anybody, Blind Man. There are some that follow me. Boann herself out of the river and Fand out of the deep sea. Witches they are, and they come by in the wind, and they cry, 'Give a kiss, fool, give a kiss', that's what they cry. That's wide enough. All the witches can come in now. (1966:461)

This latter statement is ever so apt for the humiliation of Cuchulain when he discovers that King Conchubar, in a masterstroke, has robbed him of his initiative, pride and his dynasty. In no other play of Yeats's Cuchulain saga is this national hero so robbed of honour and integrity. The dramatic resolution at the end of the play has to rely on a piece of irrationality – that witchcraft and hallucination has worsted the prized hero. It is to the same correlation to which the vestals refer in their chant:

The women none can kiss and thrive,  
For they are but whirling wind,  
Out of memory and mind.  
They would make a prince decay  
With light images of clay  
Planted in the running wave...  
But the man is thrice forlorn,  
Emptied, ruined, wracked, and lost,  
That they follow, for at most  
They will give him kiss for kiss  
While they murmur, 'After this  
Hatred may be sweet to the taste'. (1966:495– 97)

The scene preceding the battle between Cuchulain and his son is extremely subtle and impressive in that much as king Conchubar seeks to present him as an impetuous warmonger, he demonstrates great maturity in his dealing with Aoife's son. He takes his time to convince the sapling against a battle he has no resources to win. The noble instincts of a national hero

are however constantly subverted by the wizened old king who seeks after self(ish) interest in politics and will not brood the least antagonism. He interprets Cuchulain's refusal to engage the young fellow as the subjugation of honour to emotion and amorous sentiments. Conchubar's victory is therefore the triumph of cunning.

The scene in which Cuchulain slays his own son is full of dramatic ironies and the anti-heroic. He rushes in, bloody, to announce that he has mastery over witchcraft or any form of enchantment, yet it is the same bewitchment that Conchubar uses on him with such great effect (1966:517). Subsequently, he asks the fool to pour him a drink. Besotted, he begins to wipe his son's blood off his sword with the feathers the fool has dawdled along with. It is equally instructive that the same fool reveals to him that it is his own offspring that he just murdered. The awareness, which brings him to strike an empty throne and to do battle with the waves and sea, brings instant dementia to him. This hero of heroes becomes an object of ridicule before both the Fool and the Blindman and his herohood is thereby undermined. The only sense in which we can appreciate this subversion of an heroic idea is to regard it as James Flannery does as "an insistent, hypnotic rhythm through which the mind can be liberated, if only for a brief moment, from the distractions, pressures and excitements of ordinary existence." The purpose of which "is evocation rather than statement" (1996:93 – 94). It is an instance where symbolism has been heightened beyond the purview of mere analysis.

It is clear that the hero, as presented here, is far from the classical notion of the term; for that would ensure that a national hero follows a certain logic of hubris or overreaching even if the supernatural element allows for the subversion of the role. This has always helped the hero to return to the normal world from which he took off in the first place. The defense which Flannery offers for Yeats's theatre, and by implication the Yeatsian hero, is that modern theatre relies on mimesis (the direct imitation of reality) but Yeatsian theatre, being largely symbolist, relies on the phantasmagorical:

Mimesis, the direct imitation of reality, is the dominant mode of modern theatre and drama. The phantasmagorical aspect of Yeats's art poses a direct challenge to this dominant mode.... The inducement to change wrought by the phantasmagorical is inherent in the psyche and arises out

of many differing conditions: boredom, play, vision, a longing for what is absent or a need for transcendence. (1996:94)

*The Shadowy Waters* has emerged as one of Yeats's most complex experimentation both in text and in form because of its dense allusions and its existentialist, even absurdist, nature. Though it is said to date back to the 1890s, Yeats claims that he began writing it as a boy. On account of the complex and partly inscrutable final version, Yeats insists that unless the play is seen as a fairy tale, it will be impossible to adduce a prototypical meaning to it. Richard Taylor's brilliant analysis of the play, among others, has identified the mythological source of the play as the transposition of the story surrounding the supernatural birth of Cuchulain:

According to Lady Gregory's account of 'The Birth of Cuchulain' in *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* (1902) which was one of Yeats's principal sources, Dectora, the sister of Conchubar and wife of Sualtim, was carried off on her wedding day by the god Lugh of the Long Hand. She returned rather mysteriously one year later with a son who later came to be known as Cuchulain... Yeats places a figure named Dectora in similar circumstances but she and her captor enter into a mystical marriage at the world's end. (1984:48)

On the other hand, Yeats had summarised his source thus:

Once upon a time, when herons built their nests in old men's beards, Forgael, a Sea-King of ancient Ireland, was promised by certain human-headed birds love of a supernatural intensity and happiness. These birds were the souls of the dead, and he followed them overseas towards the sunset, where their final rest is. By means of a magic harp, he could call them about him when he would listen to their speech. His friend, Aibric, and the sailors of his ship, thought him mad, or that this mysterious happiness could come after death only and that he and they were being lured to destruction. Presently they captured a ship, and found a beautiful woman upon it, and Forgael subdued her and his own rebellious sailors by the sound of his harp. The sailors fled upon the other ship, and Forgael and the woman drifted on alone following the birds, awaiting death and what comes after, or some mysterious transformation of the flesh.... (1966:340)

I have quoted Yeats himself at length to allow for close textual comparison between a critique based on a Celtic source and what would appear to be



a re-casting of a Christian tale of an original sin and the search for atonement. In this play it is represented as the elusive search for a selfless, 'passion free' love; a mystic marriage. Forgael tries hard to capture the notion:

I can see nothing plain; all's mystery.  
Yet sometimes there's a torch inside my head  
That makes all clear, but when the light is gone  
I have but images, analogies.  
The mystic bread, the sacramental wine,  
The red rose where two shafts of the cross,  
Body and soul, waking and sleep, death, life  
Whatever meaning ancient allegorists  
Have settled on, are mixed into one joy.  
For what's the rose but that? Miraculous cries,  
Old stories about mystic marriages,  
Impossible truths? But when the torch is lit  
All that is impossible is certain,  
I plunge in the abyss. (1966:323)

All through the play, Forgael searches in vain for this "lighted torch inside his head", and at the point where the capture of Dectora seems to be that passionless, ideal love, he found that he has laboured still on that "which casts a shadow". He weeps bitterly over his failure to attain that for which he truly longs. His instincts overcome him and since he misuses his harp to cast a spell over Dectora who now believes him to be her true husband and king. In turn she tempts him beyond his resources into a sexual union.

There are two powerful symbolismisms in the play – that of the birds of vision and that of the power of music as symbolised by the mystic harp. Of the birds, the Second Sailor remarks:

My mother used to be talking of birds of the sort.  
They are sent by the lasting watchers to lead men  
away from this world and its women to some place  
of shining women that cast no shadow, having lived  
before the making of the earth. But I have no mind  
to go following him to that place. (1966:319)

And of the harp he says:

I would have made an end of him long  
Ago, but I was in dread of his harp. It is said  
that when he plays upon it he has power over all the  
listeners, with or without the body, seen or unseen,  
and any man that listens grows to be as mad as himself. (1966:319)

The use of the birds as visionary elements here echoes a parallel usage to which William Blake also puts them (Erdman, 1975:19) and the harp would seem to echo the Biblical harp of David. This play exemplifies the high point of Yeats's philosophy, which bring together Folk and Christian elements and wroughts a millenarian philosophy out of them. The hero Forgael, caught between a residual instinct of the conquering self and the liberating self suddenly finds himself at the end of one era and the beginning of a new one. Yeats's theatre, in putting his heroes at points of historical and existential conflict, gives a message to his audience as well. His theatre becomes an art, which creates, in Flannery's view:

a heightened awareness of the very process of existence predicated upon the belief that ... "the whole universe is a reflection magnified of our most inward nature". Such a theatre would not be an all purpose panacea but rather a challenge to the ideal self latent in the personality of every man and woman, and a nourishment to the soul on its lonely and difficult path towards individuation. (1996:106)

## Conclusion

I shall like to conclude on the note that Yeats, in an attempt to create larger than life characters relied instinctively on two modes of portraiture. The first is to draw characters from models he knows in real life or from myths and folklore he collected from his native Ireland. The first play I discussed, *Countess Cathleen* was done partly in this fashion. It was written for, and dedicated to, Maud Gonno who, apart from her platonic association with him, had been working in support of starving peasants in the west of Ireland (Henn, 1966:118). Yeats himself underscores this point in the general introduction to his works (1961:509) that:

A poet writes always of his personal life, in his finest work out of its tragedy, whatever it be, remorse, lost love, or mere loneliness; he never speaks directly as to someone at the breakfast table, there is always a phantasmagoria. (1961:509)

Some of the dilemma imposed on the hero(ine) which makes him/her lapse into personal rather than communal role will be due to the craft of translating individuals into archetypes and heroes or heroines. This leads to the second cause of the problem which is not unconnected with attempts at creating larger than life, theatrically optimal, phantasmagorical figures for the interpretation of mythologies, dreams and visions. Yeats's involvement with magic, religion and occultism has led him into dreaming up figures from other worlds which must find a blood and flesh existence in theatrical roles. He writes in his essay, "Discoveries: Prophet, Priest and King":

All art is dream, and what the day is done with is dreaming ripe, and what art has moulded religion accepts, and in the end all is in the wine cup, all is in the drunken fantasy, and the grapes begin to stammer. (1961:285)

This second aspect has led him to the use of masks in the theatre, and along with the plasticity of masks, the use of carefully structured poetry and lyrical prose. It is to Yeats's credit that he thereafter matches character to role, and situation to language. While he continued to influence the texture of symbolist and ritual theatre in the twentieth century, there will continue to remain the problem of whether his heroes and heroines speak aloud for themselves or in a muffled tone for their society.

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