

cycles of heroic tale (having also their mythical elements)—the cycle of Ulster, the cycle of Leinster—the first of which gathers round Concobar and Cuculainn, and the second round Finn and Oisín and Oscar. Among these heroic figures a multitude of other heroes stand, each of whom, like the knights of the Round Table, has his own tale. Mingled through and through these stories, there are a number of episodic legends, tales of battles, of voyages, of destructions, of slaughters, of sieges, of tragedies, of cow-spoils, of courtships, of cares, of adventures, of war-expeditions, of feasts, of elopements, of loves, of inundations, of immigrations, and of visions. Along with these, there are a number of poems and of imaginative tales, partly in verse and partly in prose; and the most of these originally belonged to pre-Christian times. Then follow the Christian legends, and the Christian reworkings of the ancient tales; the lives of the Irish Saints, the monastic writings, the liturgies, the prophecies, the laws, and the histories.

A great deal contained in this vast mass of manuscripts is not literature, that is, it is not noble thought and passionate feeling expressed in beautiful form, and this society will scarcely care to reproduce these inferior pieces in translation, although portions of them would be of rare interest to the philologist, the historian, and the antiquary. Our work on this ancient literature ought to confine itself to the pieces of the finest quality, the tales and poems which are full of humanity and of nature, which breathe the Irish spirit in every page; where the mythical elements are most vigorous, and where the heroic elements are more instinct with natural and supernatural imagination. Translation, then, is our business. We wish to get the ancient Irish literature well and steadily afloat on the world wide ocean of the English language, so that it may be known and loved wherever the English language goes. The first thing to do is to get the best forms of the heroic stories and poems, into *accurate* translation. The translator ought to be not only a scholar, but also an artist. I wish we had an Early Irish Text Society.

When such translations have been made then we shall have the material for the

second thing I should wish done, and then we should have the right to do it. That second thing is that Irishmen of formative genius should take, one by one, the various cycles of Irish tales, and grouping each of them round one central figure, such as Manannán or Cuculainn or Finn, supply to each a dominant human interest to which every event in the whole, should converge. It could then be possible to add to each of these cycles either a religious centre, such as the Holy Grail was to the Arthurian tale; or a passionate centre such as the love of Lancelot and Guinevere—and this would knit together the reworking of each cycle into an imaginative unity. I want, in fact, the writers to recreate each cycle in his own mind into a clearly constructed whole, having an end to which the beginning looks forward, and to promote which every episode is used. This single web of a quasi-epic narrative ought to be put into a form, and written in language fitted for the reading of our own time, but preserving the ancestry of the story. The books ought to be done in prose, and the way in which Malory treated the various Arthurian tales is a good example of what I mean. I look on this as of the greatest importance, for the floating of Irish story in the world, for its favorable reception, use, and influence.

The third kind of work on these imaginative tales, may be more fitly done in verse than in prose. The main stories are full of episodes, of the adventures of selected heroes, such as were intruded by men who wanted fresh subjects into the Arthurian Tale; of the births and the deaths of champions, such as the birth of Cuculainn who is the son of God, or the death of Conaire which has been so well isolated, by Sir Samuel Ferguson; of fairy loves for mortal men, as that of Fand, for Cuculainn; or that of the fairy Princess, for Oisín, who carries him, riding over the green ocean to the land of everlasting youth; of romantic voyages like that of St. Brendan, a story which enchanted Europe. These, and there are hundreds of them form delightful subjects for short poems in English. They might be treated with great freedom; recreated in a brilliant modern form; and fashioned in new metres or in old. It would be difficult to do this