INTRODUCTION

W.B. Yeats (1865-1939) emerged on the international literary scene with a highly developed sensitiveness to modern malady—always a background of "boredom" ¹, "stupidity"², "absurdity"³, "violence"⁴, "crime"⁵, and "distress"⁶. He believes that the tormenting sense of emptiness, restless envy, self-contempt, religious idiosy, frustration, rootlessness are the result of man's alienation from man, from society, from religion and from his own self. The problem is intensified by multidimensional estrangement which is the common heritage of man. In his poems the reader finds himself in a recognizable landscape of "senseless tumult"⁷. The death of noble ideals has made the world a "barren"⁸ tract. To him the world is more thorny, even more hostile than the windswept landscape of thorny trees. W.B. Yeats finds himself in a hollow world where history repeats itself in viciousness and man stands insulted for his "heart's agony"⁹ and disgraced for his open heartedness. (W.B. Yeats finds life marked

2. Ibid., p.633.
3. Ibid., p.556.
4. Ibid., p.638.
5. Ibid., p.478.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., p.426.
8. Ibid., p.401.
9. Ibid., p.452.
with terror, excitement, "grief"¹, "cruelty"² and "decay"³. The image of man "Riddled with light"⁴, shot through and confounded by the devastation of understanding passes into that of the confusion of the physical turmoil of the struggle and the mind's bewilderment. In a letter written on 14th March 1898, when he was revising Morada, Yeats confessed to Katharine Tynan the fact that his poetry is a poetry "of longing and complaint, the cry of the heart against necessity"⁵. Through a startling conjunction of ideas and imagery, he portrays a general human predicament obscure and painful states of mind, dissolution of values and death cry of a civilization. Thus, his poetry depicts in ironic terseness the confusion, the trouble and the obscure perplexity of life that leads to the waste of virtues leaving man "ailing and ignorant"⁶. In the preface to Letters to the New Island, Yeats writes:

My isolation from ordinary men and women was increased by an asceticism destructive of mind and body, combined with an adoration of physical beauty that made it meaningless. Sometimes the barrier between myself and other people filled me with terror; an unfinished poem, and the first and never finished version of The Shadowy Waters had this terror for their theme. I had in an extreme degree the shyness (I know no better word) that keeps a man from speaking his own thought. Burning with hatred and adoration, I wrote verse common to every sentimental body and girl, and that may be the reason why the poems upon which my popularity has depended until a few years ago were written before I was twenty-seven.⁷

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.443.
2. Ibid., p.440.
3. Ibid., p.466.
4. Ibid., p.316.
The repugnance to the world of actuality is there in The Song of the Happy Shepherd. This might be taken as an expression of Yeats' central theme:

The woods of Arcady are dead,
And over is their antique joy;
Of old the world on dreaming fed;
Grey Truth is now her painted toy;
Yet still she turns her restless head:
But O, sick children of the world,
Of all the many changing things
In dreary dancing past us whirled,
To the cracked tune that Chironos sings,
Words alone are certain good.¹

He writes always of his personal life, in his finest work, out of his own tragedy, whatever it be 'religious gloom'², 'vague distress'³ or 'unrequited love'⁴.

The Sligo background characterizes his early work, prose as well as poetry. In a poem published a year before his death he calls on his ancestors to judge what he has done:

He that in Sligo at Drumcliff
Set up the old stone Cross,
That red-headed rector in Country Down,
A good man on a horse,
Sandymount Corbets, that notable man
Old William Pollexfen,
The smuggler Middleton, Butlers far back,
Half legendary men.⁵

¹ The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.65.
² Ibid., p.584.
³ Ibid., p.390.
⁴ Ibid., p.356.
⁵ Ibid., p.604.
These influences were to come to their fruition towards the end of his life. What came at the beginning was his intimacy with country things. All the beauty in The Stolen Child derives from Sligo background — "the rocky highland/Of Sleuth Wood in the lake"\(^1\), the "flapping herons"\(^2\) waking the "drowsy water-rats"\(^3\) and the "faery vats"\(^4\) full of "berries"\(^5\) and of "reddest stolen cherries"\(^6\). Not only this but the "brown mice bob/Round and round the oatmeal-chest"\(^7\) and the "kettle on the hob"\(^8\) and the "calves on the warm hillside"\(^9\) reveal his knowledge of homely country things.

But to read that early volume Crossways (1889) is to find that every poem, save the Indian ones, bears the stamp of Irish country character and Irish country scene. The Sad Shepherd is one of such poems:

\begin{quote}
And lo! my ancient burden may depart.
Then he sang softly nigh and pearly rim;
But the sad dweller by the sea-ways lone
Changed all he sang to inarticulate moan
Among her wildering whirls, forgetting him.\(^{10}\)
\end{quote}

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.86.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p.87.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., p.88.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., p.69.
The Gyres voices a principal response of the poet to Ireland's history during his life. It stands for a deep and lasting social wish, never fully to be embodied in any one poem, but forced to its clearest statement by the actual course of the nationalist revolt against the Empire:

The gyres! the gyres! Old Rocky Face, look forth;
Things thought too long can be no longer thought,
For beauty dies of beauty, worth of worth,
And ancient lineaments are blotted out.
Irrational streams of blood are staining earth;¹

The subsequent development of the new Ireland created a situation wholly contrary to Yeats' wishes and assumptions. More and more its reality pressed upon these ideas, so that as the hope for their realization in Ireland fades and disappears, the evocations of the reality more and more display simplification and falsification:

Conduct and work grow coarse, and coarse the soul,
What matter? Those that Rocky Face holds dear,
Lovers of horses and of women, shall,
From marble of a broken sepulchre,
Or dark betwixt the polecat and the owl,
Or any rich, dark nothing disinter
The workman, noble and saint, and all things run
On that unfashionable gyre again.²

The same despair dominates Under Ben Bulben:

Cast your mind on other days
That we in coming days may be
Still the indomitable Irishry.³

¹ The Poems of W.B. Yeats. p.564.
² Ibid.
³ Ibid., p.640.
The poet laments the descent into banality:

Irish poets, learn your trade,
Sing whatever is well made,
Scorn the sort now growing up
All out of shape from toe to top,
Their unremembering hearts and heads
Base-born products of base beds.
Sing the peasantry, and then
Hard - riding country gentlemen, 1

In *The Statues*, he laments the loss of great and glorious values:

We Irish, born into that ancient sect
But thrown upon this filthy modern tide
And by its formless spawning fury wrecked. 2

There is the poetry arising out of the events which he was aware of at first hand. *The Stare's Nest By My Window* with its polarities states the predicament of man in modern scientific age:

We are closed in, and the key is turned
On our uncertainty; 3 ......

The poet says that the people feed 'the heart on fantasies' 4 and that there is:

More substance in our enmities
Than in our love; 5

Yeats could never compass the sense of the brutality and exaltation of remote Celtic war and he recognized his

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.639.
2. Ibid., p.611.
3. Ibid., p.425.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
failure in *The Circus Animals' Desertion*. He describes it as the "Themes of the embittered heart". The traditional Yeatsian attack is often exclamatorium:

> What shall I do with this absurdity —

He concludes:

> O but there is wisdom
In what the sages said;

Yeats' sense of aloofness, of disdain, is often intimated by a constant adjective 'some'. In the revised *The Lamentation of the Old Pensioner*, he says:

> ..........lads are making pikes again
For some conspiracy;

*The Man and the Echo* is the last and perhaps the most haunting of Yeats' dialogue poems. "In a cleft that's christened Alt"—apparently a magical place near Sligo, and here conceived as a sort of Irish Delphi—the poet cries out amid broken stone which will presently yield the "Rocky Voice" of the echo. What he would be unburdened of is the sense of a life's responsibilities ill discharged. Night after night he has considered his past actions:

And all seems evil until I
Sleepless would lie down and die.¹

There is no answer to the poet's final question:

O Rocky Voice,
Shall we in that great night rejoice?²

The springtide of love is followed by its autumn in The Falling
of the Leaves where, in lines of slow and grave rhythm, the
lover describes the ebbing of love:

The hour of the waning of love has beset us,
And weary and worn are our sad souls now;
Let us part, are the season of passion forget us,
With a kiss and a tear on the dropping brow.³

The Stolen Child presents the same centrifugal pull in a differ-
ent context. It is the fairy world, though rooted solidly in
the familiar Sligo scenery, luring a "solemn-eyed"⁴ child from
the world of human labour and pain. The refrain is significant:

Come away, O human Child!
To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping
than you can understand.⁵

The contrast between the decayed body and vigorous
heart and mind irked him profoundly and his later poetry re-
sounds with bitter condemnation of this muddy vesture of decay:

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.632.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p.79.
4. Ibid., p.88.
5. Ibid., p.87.
Never had I more
Excited, passionate, fantastical
Imagination, nor an ear and eye
The more expected the impossible—

Yeats regretted all his life the divorce between wisdom and power, between the energy of ignorant and youth and ripe experience of the decrepit age. The ecstasy of a mystic, the dreams of a visionary and spiritualist, the speculation of a philosopher, picturing the conditions of the soul after death in Purgatory and in Paradise, lie side by side with the experience of a man of the world, with his yearnings and frustrations, his tussle with the unruly crowd and the Pig-headed rich, his enthusiastic commendation of the national heroes and cynical asperity against petty-minded politicians, consumed by "intellectual hatred"; his deep concern with the violence and murderousness of the times and his unhesitating surrender to the coarse delight of Crazy Jack and Tom, the lunatic as well as the aimless joy of the Fool, wild as the hills and free as the air. Yeats describes the sequence slightly different as:

........ three enchanted islands, allegorical dreams,
Vain gaiety, vain battle, vain repose,

To a Shade brings us back to a world of dead values.

Ironically, if the ghost of Parnell were to revisit the town,

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 409.
2. Ibid., p. 405.
3. Ibid., p. 629.
it would be either to contemplate his "monument",\(^1\) or the circumstances in which the town is given dignity by the elimination of the human element:

when grey gulls flit about instead of men,  
And the gaunt houses put on Majesty.\(^2\)

And:

Your enemy, an old foul mouth, had set  
The pack upon him.\(^3\)

There is no place for the shade here, for even a marginal concession to Parnell's spirit, for minor remnants of the noble which would permit the ghost to listen at the corners, what Parnell represents is more likely to survive in the tomb than in the reality of contemporary Ireland.

He finds man's life overshadowed by "cruel happiness"\(^4\) and "horrible splendour of desire".\(^5\). Their lives are marked with "idleness"\(^6\), "calamity"\(^7\), "aimlessness"\(^8\), "pride"\(^9\), "darkness"\(^10\), clumsiness\(^11\), "curse"\(^12\), "pain"\(^13\).

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1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.292.  
2. Ibid.  
3. Ibid.  
4. Ibid., p.453.  
5. Ibid., p.411.  
6. Ibid., p.151.  
8. Ibid., p.421.  
9. Ibid., p.471.  
10. Ibid., p.477.  
11. Ibid., p.479.  
12. Ibid., p.485.  
13. Ibid., p.487.
"vanity"\(^1\) and "grief"\(^2\).

Yeats reflects upon the unfortunate life of the unbelieving godless creatures, the wretched generation of enlightened men who have their roots among the clay and worms and are prone even to the "stupidity/Of root, shoot, blossom or clay"\(^3\).

The poet presents the portraits of the "dead Ireland"\(^4\) of his youth. He pictures it as a "foul world in its decline and fall"\(^5\) where "gangling stocks"\(^6\) have "grown great"\(^7\) and "great stocks run dry."\(^8\) He presents an extremely deplorable state of the society:

Ancestral pearls all pitched into a sty,  
Heroic reverie mocked by clown and knave.\(^9\)

There is in \textit{The Municipal Gallery Revisited} a vein of malicious or passionate contempt for many things; for the new Ireland that might correspond to the poet's imagination, "terrible and gay."\(^10\) "Heart-smitten with emotion"\(^11\), he sinks down and muses over the doom and decay that has prevailed.

\(^{1}\) The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.495.  
^{2}\) Ibid., p.500.  
^{3}\) Ibid., p.600.  
^{4}\) Ibid., p.602.  
^{5}\) Ibid., p.619.  
^{6}\) Ibid.  
^{7}\) Ibid.  
^{8}\) Ibid.  
^{9}\) Ibid.  
^{10}\) Ibid., p.602.  
^{11}\) Ibid.
But where is the brush that could show anything
of all that pride and that humility?
And I am in despair that time may bring
Approved patterns of women or of men
But not that selfsame excellence again. 1

In The Apparitions, he believes that a paradoxical
reversal in traditional human values has led men to a state
of complete ignorance. Therefore, he finds "nothing half so good" 2 as his "long-planned half solitude" 3 where he
can sit up "half the night" 4 with some friend. Yeats,
aware most poignantly of his own age, was struck by the irre-
versibility of the event by a sense of something old having
ended, of something new being born:

A world seems to have been swept away. 5

The extremes between which Yeats moved at the time
when he was composing Easter 1916 are wonderfully expressed
by a symbolic transitional passage in Section III of the poem,
in which our eyes are first directed upward, from the road to
the horse, to his rider, to the birds among the clouds, and
then downward once more, by means of the shadow of the cloud
on the stream, to the horse's hoof plunging into the stream

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 602.
2. Ibid., p. 614.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
where the stone that forever now will 'trouble the living stream' 1:

The horse that comes from the road,
The rider, the birds that range
From cloud to rumbling cloud,
Minute by minute they change;
A shadow of cloud on the stream
Changes minute by minute;
A horse-hoof slides on the brim,
And a horse plashes within it;
The long-legged moor-hens dive,
And hens to moor-cocks call: 2

Yeats refers to the loss of inner harmony brought about by man's ignorance. Yeats accepted the fact that we have lost the old nonchalance of the hand, being critics who but half create:

Timid, entangled, empty and abashed,
Lacking the countenance of our friends. 3

Yeats is aware of the spiritual bankruptcy of man in modern society. In The Chambermaid's First Song, Yeats presents an extremely demoralizing picture of man caught in the mire of modern civilization. He holds that there is hardly anything 'left to sigh for' 4 and concludes:

Pleasure has made him
Weak as a worm. 5

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 393.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 368.
4. Ibid., p. 574.
5. Ibid.
where the stone that forever now will "trouble the living stream": 1

The horse that comes from the road,
The rider, the birds that range
From cloud to rumbling cloud,
Minute by minute they change;
A shadow of cloud on the stream
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1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 393.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 368.
4. Ibid., p. 574.
5. Ibid.
The reference is specific. The human body as such is not foul. What is foul is, in this context, its decay - the loss of that power, mainly sexual which Yeats frequently symbolized in terms of the dance. Six days before writing this poem Yeats had rendered that power in Crazy Jane Grown

Old Looks at the Dancers:

God be with the times when I
Cared not a thraneen for what chanced
So that I had the limbs to try
Such a dance as there was danced -
Love is like the lion's tooth. ¹

Evil, thus, creates a moral alienation, which is deeply injurious to the growth of the spirit. It leads to a certain hardening of the arteries in such a poem as News for the Delphic Oracle. The first stanza goes:

There all the golden codgers lay,
There the silver dew,
And the great water sighed for love,
And the wind sighed too.
Man-picker Niamh leant and sighed
By Oisin on the grass:
There sighed amid his choir of love
Tall Pythagoras.
Plotinus came and looked about,
The salt-flakes on his breast,
And having stretched and yawned awhile
Lay sighing like the rest. ²

Yeats believes that sensuality or licentiousness is eating into the vitals of life in modern age. It has become the

¹. The Poems of W.E. Yeats, p.514.
². Ibid., p.611.
deadliest foe of man. It has destroyed the knowledge of self. It is all consuming and all-polluting. The modern man given to the pursuit of pleasure of senses has become a degenerate soul. In The Chambermaid's Second Song, he says:

From pleasure of the bed,
Dull as a worm,
His rod and its butting head
Limp as a worm,
His spirit that has fled
Blind as a worm.¹

Thus, licentiousness, which is an important off shoot of the main theme of evil in the poems of Yeats, is rife with indications of serious suggestions in the Bible.²

Grappling with the evil of a regimented civilization Yeats broods over the calamitous change brought about by the materialistic order. All that was human is being broken into fragments. He condemns this world which is "full of troubles"³. Yeats believes that materialistic order has triggered off the process of disintegration in social life:

To and fro we leap
And chase the frothy bubbles.⁴

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¹ The Poems of W. B. Yeats, p. 575.
² The Bible: "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul". 1. Peter II-11.
³ The Poems of W. B. Yeats, p. 87.
⁴ Ibid.
He, therefore, wants the child to go as far as possible from the "dim grey sands" of life:

For he comes, the human child,  
To the waters and the wild  
With a faery, hand in hand,  
From a world more full of weeping  
than he can understand.  

Thus, man can "Sing peace into his breast" only when "'Away'" from this devitalised society he goes to buoyant streams and dwells there in a calm, serene and tranquil atmosphere.

The general fiasco which Yeats so often evokes and the web of guilt that prisons every upright person, the cry of the lost and inadequate, the cry of those who are unequal to the demands of life make him restless. In The Two Trees, the lover wants his beloved to understand the ills and ailments of the "'flaming circle of our days'". He, therefore, asks her:

Gaze no more in the bitter glass  
The demons, with their subtle guile,  
Lift up before us when they pass,  
Or only gaze a little while;  
For there a fatal image grows  
That the stormy night receives,  
Roots half hidden under snows,  
Broken boughs and blackened leaves.  
For all things turn to barreness  
In the dim glass the demons hold,  
The glass of outer weariness.

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1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.37.  
2. Ibid., p.38.  
3. Ibid.  
4. Ibid.  
5. Ibid., p.135.  
6. Ibid.
Yeats employs powerful nature-imagery to convey man's mental bewilderment. He finds man wandering aimlessly in a world without meaning:

There, through the broken branches, go
The ravens of unresting thought;
Flying, crying, to and fro,
Cruel claw and hungry throat,
Or else they stand and sniff the wind,
And shake their ragged wings; alas!  

Yeats talks of the soulless creatures:

..........the dark folk who live in souls
Of passionate men, like bats in the dead trees;  

They seem to

..........sigh with mingled sorrow and content,
Because their blossoming dreams have never bent
Under the fruit of evil and of good:
And of the embattled flaming multitude.  

Here is no knowledge, no communication, no possession.

Yeats believes that many of us are, therefore, only half-alive members of an ashamed, dull, boring and hopeless race, a race of solitary individuals crumpled, grubby, dazed and late. Most of us are lonely, there is nothing to bring a smile to the face. Our sense of alienation and selfishness reduce human relationship to a series of shadow on a screen.

we sit locked in the prison-house of our-self centeredness,

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.135.
2. Ibid., p.136.
3. Ibid.
practising the sentimental notions. This is the point at which

The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.¹

The stumbling-block itself is represented in terms of blood and its attendant brutishness. There is the blood that blocks Plotinus' eyes, the blood-dimmed tide, and the innocents' reopened wound which give forth blood as the innocents pass through the water. Further, there are many creatures of blood which serve to contrast with the immortal innocents and the "choir of love"²: These are the "brute dolphins,"³ Pelus, who stare at Thetis' naked body while

Foul goat-head, brutal arm appear
Belly, shoulder, bum,
Flash fishlike;⁴

and in The Second Coming a shape with a lion body and the head of a man, and indignant - desert birds. This also reminds us of "the frog - spawn of a blind man's ditch ..."⁵ of A Dialogue of Self and Soul. Yeats general description of modern civilization in Blood and the Moon as "this pragmati-
cal, preposterous pig of a world"⁶ and many other metaphors

¹. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.402.
². Ibid., p.612.
³. Ibid.
⁴. Ibid.
⁵. Ibid., p.479.
⁶. Ibid., p.481.
dealing with "ditch" and "blood" reflect the theme of alienation in his poems.

Yeats imparts new dimensions to poetic technique to unfold the theme of alienation. He is a connoisseur in imagery. Images ride rampant through the works of Yeats. The images which convey the sense of alienation are those that reveal the filth of the external world—least mystical and closest to that of enlightened modern thought, including scientific thought. His choice is largely pragmatic. Some of the lyrics represent the triumph of the imagination over the external world as painful and short-lived at best. The theme of The Results of Thought is the poet's recollection of his friends in their youth, and his contrast of their present ruim with their former vigor. Thinking of them, he restores their images which youth, "that inhuman/Bitter glory", has destroyed:

Acquaintance, companion;  
One dear brilliant woman;  
The best—endowed, the elect,  
All by their youth undone,  
All, all, by that inhuman  
Bitter glory wrecked.  
But I have straightened out  
Ruin, wreck and wrack;  
I toiled long years and at length  
Came to so deep a thought  
I can summon back  
All their wholesome strength. 1

In the final stanza he is so taken with his dream that he

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 505.
dismisses the present, senile shapes of his friends as negligible, even suggesting that he does not know them in such disguises:

What images are these,
That turn dull - eyed away,
Or shift time's filthy road,
Straighten aged knees,
Hesitate or stay?
What heads shake or nod?¹

The effect of the poem comes from the reader's understanding that the speaker in battling to the last against the irresistible, vainly but grandly spitting, as in The Lamentation of the Old Pensioner, in the face of time. Girl's Song affords a good contrast, for it finds the cleavage between youth and age, grounds for tears rather than heroism:

I went out alone
To sing a song or two,
My fancy on a man,
And you know who.

Another came in sight
That on a stick relied
To hold himself upright;
I sat and cried.

And that was all my song -
When everything is told,
Saw I an old man young
Or young man old?²

This time imagination has less power.

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1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 509.
2. Ibid., p. 513.
The most moving of Yeats' many fine poems about the images in the mind's eye and those in the external world is *Among School Children*, which he wrote in 1926. The last three stanzas of the poem have evoked some controversy. In them Yeats speaks of the powerful theories of Plato, Aristotle, and Pythagoras, only to dismiss them because the theories, great as they were, proved powerless to avert the philosophers' own decrepitude and death. Power and knowledge, as he said in *Blood and the Moon* and implied in *Leda and the Swan*, cannot exist together. Yet there is one escape from mortality: when our eyes are blinded by love, like those of a mother regarding her son, of a lover regarding his beloved, or of a nun regarding Christ, we see images which are independent of life or fact. Such images, like Attis' image in *Vacillation* or the image of the work of art in Byzantium, are changeless, and heaven can be nothing else but the state to which they seem to allude. Because they do not depend upon observation, and in fact flout the evidence of the senses to which decay and mortality are real, they are 'self-born';

But Nuns and mothers worship images,  
But those the candles light are not as those  
That animate a mother's reveries,  
But keep a marble or a bronze repose.  
And yet they too break-hearts—O Presences  
That passion, piety, or affection knows,  
And that all heavenly glory symbolise—  
O self-born mockers of man's enterprise;

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In such images at such moments time and appearance are destroyed. Nevertheless there is grief at the moment of triumph. For in life the body is bruised to pleasure soul, beauty comes only from 'despair' at its lack, and wisdom is tainted by the toil with which it is gained. Yeats' irony gathers in the word 'where' at the beginning of the last stanza: Labour blossoms in images, in heavenly glory if there is any and, through the ecstatic character of the last few lines, in the poem itself. But the ecstasy comes from desperate sorrow over the inadequacy of the tenacious world of appearance.

In his last poems Yeats bears down firmly on the inadequacy of the real world when compared to the image of the ideal. The absence of a contemporary equal to the heroes of old times puts Crazy Jane in tears. In Crazy Jane on the mountain he says:

I am tired of cursing the Bishop,
(Said Crazy Jane)
Nine books or nine hats
Would not make him a man.
I have found something worse
To meditate on.
A king had some beautiful cousins,
But where are they gone?
Battered to death in a cellar,
And he stuck to his throne.
Last night I lay on the mountain,
(Said Crazy Jane)
There in a two-horsed carriage
That on two wheels ran
Great bladdered Ender sat,
Her violent man
Cuchulain sat at her side;
Thereupon,
Proped upon my two knees,
I kissed a stone,
I lay stretched out in the dirt
And I cried tears down.3

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 623.
But Yeats is not swift; such despair is nowhere near absolute. The force of Crazy Jane's emotions, her exaltation of powerful images once seen and her evocation of them in the poem, save her from chronic melancholy.

The claim which Yeats makes for the vitality of mental images brings him steadily back to a consideration of the images of death.

He does not always say, as in _The Tower_ and _Death_, that death is a man-made creation. In fact, his three poems on Robert Gregory's death might have been written by members of three different religious denominations. The first _Shepherd_ and _Goatherd_, is a dialogue in which the Shepherd portrays Gregory's life, while the Goatherd traces the progress of the soul after death. On the other hand, no mention of an after life relieves the sorrow of the second poem, _In memory of Major Robert Gregory_. At the request of Lady Gregory, who did not want him to affront the British public, Yeats did not publish the third poem, _Reprisals_, addressed to Major Gregory, but in it he makes powerful use of the ghost rather than the soul of the dead man, and concludes by urging Gregory to lie still in his tomb and be utterly dead. The first two poems focus on the dead man's virtues, and the third on the poet's rage over the Black and Tans, so that in none of them is the philosophical theme of the nature of death the dominant one. In _Reprisals_ Yeats says:
Some nineteen German planes, they say,  
You had brought down before you died  
As called it a good death. Today  
Can ghost or man be satisfied?  
Although your last exciting year  
Outweighed all other years, you said,  
Though battle joy may be so dear  
A memory, even to the dead,  
It chases other thought away,  
Yet rise from your Italian tomb,  
Flit to Kiltartan Cross the stay  
Till certain second thoughts have come  
Upon the cause you served, that we  
Imagined such a fine affair:  
Half-drunk or whole-mad soliloquy  
Are murdering your tenants there.  
Men that reverse your father yet  
Are shot at on the open plain.  
Where may now-married women sit  
And suckle children now? Armed men  
May murder them in passing by  
Nor law nor parliament take heed.  
Then close your ears with dust and lie  
Among the other cheated dead.¹

The poet, first a Buddhist, then a stoic, and finally a  
spiritualist, can look at death as well as other images with  
changing eyes.

While Yeats frequently takes the position, as in the  
last of the Gregory poems, that this world, lamentable though  
it is, exists, he sometimes suggests, with Blake or the Hindu  
seers, that this world is a fiction, and death mere fantasy.  
So he declares, in Old Tom Again:

¹. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.791.
Things out of perfection sail,
And all their swelling canvas fail,
or shall the self-begotten fail
Though fantastic men suppose
Building-yard and stormy shore,
ending-sheet and swaddling-clothes.

This is the opposite position to that of The Tower, where
life and death are real precisely because "fantastic men" have imagined them so. Yeats' attitude is even more Eastern
in Meru, named for India's holy mountain. According to this
poem, man's life is nothing but illusion; and reality, if
like the Hindu ascetic we could attain it, would turn out to
be desolation.

This view, that man needs mythologies and fictions
in order to live, is altered in Meru to the exciting theme
that man is never satisfied until he destroys all he has created:

Civilization is hooped together, brought
Under a rule, under the semblance of peace
By manifold illusion; but man's life is thought,
And he, despite his terror, cannot cease
Reverting through century after century,
Raving, raging, and uprooting that he may come
Into the desolation of reality:
Egypt and Greece, good-bye, and good-bye, Rome!
Hermits upon Mount Meru or Everest,
Caverned in night under the drifted snow,
or where that snow and winter's dreadful blast
Beat down upon their naked bodies, know
That day brings round the night, that before dawn
His glory and his monuments are gone. 2

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 530.
2. ibid., p. 583.
In spite of the poem's location and declarative tone, it is personalized so as to fit no other man's religion or philosophy. Its principal emphasis is not on the illusory character of life, but on man's courage and obligation to strip illusion away, in spite of the terror of nothingness with which he will be left.

Yeats' poetry is bound together by one unchanging conviction, the desirability of intense, unified, imaginative consciousness. But apart from this central pillar, it reveals a series of points of view, sometimes parallel and sometimes divergent.

To explain and confirm his practice Yeats evolved a hypothesis which is closer to defining the situation in which the modern poet finds himself than negative capability. It might be described as affirmative capability, for it begins with the poet's difficulties but emphasizes his resolutions of them. Rejecting Keats' negative capability Yeats considers it the poet's duty to invade the province of the intellect as well as of the emotions. Neither the intellect nor the emotions can be satisfied to remain in uncertainties, mysteries, and doubts; they demand the more solid fare of affirmations.

Thus a sense of protest which rings through Yeats' works is a proof that man is put to utter disgrace, humiliation and waste. It is an inevitable consequence of the mental.
social and moral condition of Western Europe at the close of 19th century. Everlasting protest, gloom and melancholy show his strong sense of alienation from a society which, he thinks, is rotten at the core.

In the following chapter attention is focused on the theme of social alienation in the poetry of W.B. Yeats.