CHAPTER-II

SOCIAL ALIENATION

Yeats considers social alienation as a phenomenon which is the product of social, economic, technological, materialistic and secular conditions of the society. The fact of alienation is seen either in behavioural or cultural norms. He believes that industrialism has destroyed many of the traditional institutions which previously created in man a sense of belongingness. The anonymity and impersonality of human relations resulting from increased mechanization have accentuated individual isolation and frustration. Depersonalization and dehumanization result in the individual's loss of identity. Yeats' poetry embodies his strong dislikings of existing creeds, conventions and institutions leading to gloom and despair of man and disintegration of society as a whole. In The Great Day, he ironically reacts to the hollow and vicious social order bringing about moral degeneration of man:

Hurrah for revolution and more cannon-shot!
A beggar upon horseback lashes a beggar on foot.
Hurrah for revolution and cannon come again!
The beggars have changed places, but the lash goes on.]

Yeats believes that man, in the modern industrial and secular society, has become a mere mechanical adjunct to the various social and economic institutions which imperceptibly take control.

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 590.
of him. In The Wild Old Wicked Man, he says:

All men live in suffering,  
I know as few can know,  
Whether they take the upper road  
Or stay content on the low,  
Rowan bent in his row-boat  
Or weaver bent at his loom,  
Horseman erect upon horseback  
Or child hid in the womb.  
Daybreak and a candle-end.  

He seeks to explain his social and psychological dress up in the post-modern period, illustrate his responses to increased mechanization of social life and the challenges he faces in a fast changing and modernizing world. Yeats explains the ills of a modern capitalist society - which is "deaf and dumb and blind."\(^2\) It is characterized by "lamenting hands"\(^3\) and "lulled weariness"\(^4\), "pensive laughter"\(^5\) and "inhuman sound"\(^6\). He finds people "cold and dead"\(^7\) to the basic norms of life. The "indolent desire"\(^8\) has tainted "the proud heart"\(^9\) of the "terror-stricken"\(^10\) man; there are "praise and flattery"\(^11\) and "hate and fear"\(^12\) prevailing

---

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 589.
2. Ibid., p. 208.
3. Ibid., p. 10.
4. Ibid., p. 11.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., p. 176.
8. Ibid., p. 161.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., p. 185.
11. Ibid., p. 245.
12. Ibid., p. 254.
all around. He believes that the unavoidable consequences of science and technology make man a victim of "hatred and hope and desire and fear". The primary focus of almost all his poems has been on the increasing loss of "liberty", "simplicity", "peace", "silence and love", "nobleness", "ecstasy", "dignity", "happiness", "kindness", and the resultant situation as manifest in increasing "gloom", "sorrow", "illness", "bitterness", "decay", "lamentation", "melancholy", "madness", "sickness", and "distress" and "desolation".

He gives voice to a society that is confused by the increase of knowledge and that no longer has confidence in

---

2. Ibid., p.493.
3. Ibid., p.354.
4. Ibid., p.113.
5. Ibid., p.116.
6. Ibid., p.200.
7. Ibid., p.227.
8. Ibid., p.254.
9. Ibid., p.463.
10. Ibid., p.286.
11. Ibid., p.89.
12. Ibid., p.99.
13. Ibid., p.280.
15. Ibid., p.148.
16. Ibid., p.120.
17. Ibid., p.227.
18. Ibid., p.236.
19. Ibid., p.365.
20. Ibid., p.338.
21. Ibid., p.423.
the intellectual leaders who seek easy answers. He is desperately trying to unmask the abuses of society. He denounces astronomers:

............... Seek, then,
No learning from the starry men,
who follow with the optic glass
The whirling ways of stars that pass -
Seek, then, for this is also sooth,
No word of theirs - the cold star - bane
Has cloven and rent their hearts in twain,
And dead is all their human truth.1

The poet asserts that the antique world did better, feeding not on grey truth but on dreaming. He, therefore, advises to go and

............... gather by the humming sea
Some twisted, echo - harbouring shell,
And to its lips thy story tell,
And they thy comforters will be.2

In The Fisherman, the storm of contempt reaches its climax in

The beating down of the wise
And great Art beaten down.3

It is one of the consequences of the poet's being

............... caught between the pull
Of the dark moon and the full.4

---

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.66.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p.348.
4. Ibid., p.344.
The magnificently concrete image of the falcon flying out of control represents the progress of the Christian era towards crisis, disintegration, and an explosion of irrational forces:

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,¹

It is the point from which the new gyre will begin to unwind. The poet says:

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
In moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Heel shadows of the indignant desert birds.²

Here The Second Coming symbolises the birth of Christ which heralded the disintegration of Christian society.

In A Prayer for my Son, he supposes the child to be menaced by evil spirits who know

Of some most haughty deed or thought
That waits upon his future days.³

Both Byzantium poems are concerned with the idea of escape from the wheel, from that eternal submergence and

¹. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.402.
². Ibid.
³. Ibid., p.436.
resubmergence in natural life. But whereas in Sailing to Byzantium the poet's desire for the artifice of eternity is a passionate cry, Byzantium shows the escape as actually happening, but shows it only as mirrored in an aloof, contemplative and, perhaps, unresolved mind. The poem presents as awe-inspiring spectacle of expiation and liberation. But it is correlative with a sense that we don't quite know where things are going in "bitter furies of complexity". The dolphins in the last stanza who bear on their backs "Spirit after spirit" are not going at all:

Those images that yet
Fresh images beget,
That dolphin-torn, that going-tormented sea.  

In Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen, it is a "drunken soldiery" that can "leave the mother, murdered at her door" and persuade us that we are "but weasels fighting in a hole". There is no comfort to be found in this society:

Man is in love and loves what vanishes, what more is there to say?

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 498.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p. 499.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
A sense of insecurity is dogging the footsteps of man since the future of society seems to be dark and uncertain:

So the Platonic Year
Whirls out new right and wrong,
Whirls in the old instead;
All men are dancers and their tread
Goes to the barbarous clangeur of a gong.¹

Yeats finds man caught in the trap of his own follies:

A man in his own secret meditation
Is lost amid the labyrinth that he has made
In art or politics;
Some Platonist affirms that in the station
Where we should cast off body and trade
The ancient habit sticks,
And that if our works could
But vanish with our breath
That were a lucky death,
For triumph can but mar our solitude.²

The death of noble ideals has created a void in the society.
It has multiplied the miseries and misfortunes of man. It has resulted in spiritual anguish:

The swan has leaped into the desolate heaven:
That image can bring wildness, bring a rage
To end all things, to end
What my laborious life imagined, even
The half-imagined, the half-written page:
O but we dreamed to mend
Whatever mischief seemed
To afflict mankind, but now
That winds of winter blow
Learn that we wore crack-pated when we dreamed.³

He continues:

---

¹. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 430.
². Ibid., p. 431.
³. Ibid.
The unpurgéd images of day recede;
The emperor's drunken soldiery are abed;
Night resonance recedes, night-walkers' song
After great cathedral gong;
A staillit or a moonlit dome disdains
All that man is,
All mere complexities,
The fury and the mire of human veins.¹

Here, then, in the second Byzantium "fury and the mire"
may rule the holy city by day, and what dies away with the
"night-walker's song" is something deriving from its context
the character of a riotous revelry. All this, although it
recedes before the approach of darkness and the superhuman,
is given a compelling splendour. He says:

Before me floats an image, man or shade,
Shade more than, man, more image than a shade;
For Hades' bobbin bound in mummy-cloth
May unwind the winding path;
A mouth that has no moisture and no breath
Breathless mouths may summon;
I hail the superhuman;
I call it death-in-life and life-in-death.²

The Dedication to a Book of Stories selected from
the Irish Novelists is a very characteristic lyric which
introduces yet another favourite symbol of the poet, namely,
the tree. It presents a contrast between the past and the
present of Ireland with the changed predicament of the bard
fallen upon the modern stony times. In the past the Druid
bards with the symbolic "green branch",³ in hand could captivate,

---
¹ The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.497.
² Ibid.
³ Ibid., p.129.
soothe and comfort all ranks and classes in Ireland:

It charmed away the merchant from his guile,
And turned the farmer's memory from his cattle,
And hushed in sleep the roaring ranks of battle:
And all grew friendly for a little while.¹

But in the Ireland of today the poetic "bell-branch"² has
withered up and lost its power with the unimaginative audience.
It is a country where man can be "so crossed"³ and "so
battered, badgered and destroyed"⁴ that "he's a loveless
man"⁵ and where "saddest chimes are best enjoyed"⁶. In
its tone of poignant disillusionment and astringent diction
the points forward to the mature art of Yeats and his hatred
of the mob. The tree image links the poem to the piece that
follows. The Lamentation of the Old Pensioner which, with
characteristic Yeatsian contempt, presents the old man as a
broken tree, symbolic of aridity and loss of sap:

  And crazy rascals rage their fill
At human tyranny,
My contemplations are of Time
That has transfigured me.⁷

The sense of disillusionment haunts the old Pensioner. He
believes that:

¹ The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.129.
² Ibid., p.130.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid.
⁶ Ibid.
⁷ Ibid., p.131.
There's not a woman turns her face
Upon a broken tree,

He continues:

I spit into the face of Time
That has transfigured me.  

The poem is thematically connected with *The Second Coming* and *Meditations in Time of Civil War* when the growing fury of the British mercenary soldiers, the Black and Tans, had brought home to Yeats the growing murderousness of the times likely to bring about the total destruction of all artistic treasures and the values of life:

The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned,

It appeared as though civilization itself were at the brink of collapse and the dark night of chaos was to descend upon the European scene. In this poem *Meditations in Time of Civil War* chaos seems to have the upper hand. The meditation starts with a reference to the universal law of destruction, peculiar to the operation of time, and phases of the moon, reinforced by the violence of human vandalism. Many curious works of art, which had miraculously escaped the depredations of time, have fallen victim to the destructive forces let loose by man:

---

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.131.
That out of life's own self-delight had sprung
The abounding glittering jet; though now it seems
As if some marvellous empty sea-shell flung
Out of the obscure dark of the rich streams,
And not a fountain, were the symbol which
Shadows the inherited glory of the rich.1

It was a time of loss of noble values and high ideals of life
brought about by scientific civilization:

Some violent bitter man, some powerful man
Called architect and artist in, that they,
Bitter and violent men, might rear in stone
The sweetness that all longed for night and day,
The gentleness none there had ever known;
But when the master's buried mice can play,
And maybe the great-grandson of that house,
For all its bronze and marble, 's but a mouse.2

Despite unprecedented ease, the heart of man was full of malice
and ill will:

O what if gardens where the peacock strays
With delicate feet upon old terraces,
Or else all Juno from an urn displays
Before the indifferent garden deities;
O what if levelled lawns and gravelled ways
Where slippered Contemplation finds his ease
And Childhood a delight for ever sense,
But take our greatness with our violence?3

Even the ancient glory failed to soften the heart of man and
purge it of all baser passions:

2. Ibid., p. 418.
3. Ibid.
What if the glory of escutcheoned doors,
And buildings that a haughtier age designed,
The pacing to and fro on polished floors
Amid great chambers and long galleries, lined
With famous portraits of our ancestors;
What if those things the greatest of mankind
Consider most to magnify, or to bless,
But take our greatness with our bitterness?  

Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen carries forward the idea.
The instances cited are the wonderful "ancient image made
of olive wood"" erected at Colonus "Amid the ornamental
bronze and stone"" statues and the rare sculptures of
Phidias (BC 490-417), the supreme sculptor in ivory of Greek
antiquity, together with the "golden grasshoppers and
bees"" at Athens.

This leads to the melancholy meditation on the death
of many social and moral values which once formed the rich
possession of the poet and his compatriots. In his youth
people were confident about the integrity of law "indiffe-
rent to blame or praise""", "bribe or threat"" in the
administration of justice, conducive to the extermination
of "old wrong". There was a strong public opinion deep-
rooted and well-established, with all the air of
permanence about it, which was strongly opposed to

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.418.
2. Ibid., p.428.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
the anti-social elements and bade fare to root out "rogues and rascals"\(^1\) altogether from the soil of the country. The old evils seemed to have been reduced to a ghostly army of impotent chimeras, even though the Biblical ideal of converting the instruments of war into the implements of peace - turning the "Cannon"\(^2\) into a "ploughshare"\(^3\) was not literally realized. It appeared that the cult of war was becoming outmoded; the trumpet had lost its evocative magic and the war-horses had forgotten the war-dance in their blood:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{\textit{...................Parliament and king}} \\
&\text{Thought that unless a little powder burned} \\
&\text{The trumpeters might burst with trumpeting} \\
&\text{And yet it lack all glory; and perchance} \\
&\text{The guardsmen's drowsy chargers would not prance.}\quad 4
\end{align*}
\]

But the harsh realities of the present have rendered these notions quite illusory - just glittering bubbles.

"'Now days are dragon - ridden'\(^5\), for example, is an emphatic picture of the human savages breathing fire and fury and blasting the whole countryside during the day, and at nights, when their ugly figures are invisible, the horror of their savagery keeps the atmosphere panicky. An instance of

\begin{itemize}
\item[1.] The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 428.
\item[2.] Ibid., p. 429.
\item[3.] Ibid.
\item[4.] Ibid.
\item[5.] Ibid.
\end{itemize}
brutality of drunken soldiers is given to cap the climax. It is the wanton murder of a mother who is left in her own pool of blood, through which she will have to crawl and get a free passage onward. The whole force of withering irony lies in the unexpected presence of prosaic phrase, "scot-free". The night has lost its peace and people "sweat-with terror" cannot sleep, as if civilization had relapsed to the state of barbarism and naked savagery, which it was supposed to have reduced to law and order. The so-called civilized men simply try to pierce their "thoughts into philosophy" and plan "to bring the world under a rule".

A level-headed observer of the horrible symptoms of times, like prophetic writings on the wall, will be forced to the melancholy conviction that nothing noble, healthy and valuable can hope to survive the effect of destruction. He can have only one comfort, to shut himself up in his solitude and let destruction have its way as an inevitable law of nature.

Yet it is a deceptive comfort, for man is by nature given to love and to mourn the loss of what he loves. Gone are the good old days of Athenian Civilization:

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 429.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
...........That country round
None dared admit, if such a thought were his,
Incendiary or bigot could be found
To burn that stump on the Acropolis,
Or break in bits the famous ivories
Or traffic in the grasshoppers or bees.¹

Gone are the days when art was regarded too sacred to be
affected by vandalism or the more insidious force – the commer-
cial greed, which, according to Browne, made Egyptian mummies
articles of merchandise.

In the second part the 'dragon'² image is further explored in an artistic context. The reference is to the
ingenious dance technique of the famous American dancer, Loie
Fuller and her Chinese Troupe. She threw up a 'shining web,
a floating ribbon of cloth'³ which seemed to wriggle and wind
like a dragon falling from the air to determine and speed the
tempo of the human dancers, till they appeared to be whirling
to its own 'furious path'⁴.

In the third part the poet tries to catch at another
straw of poor consolation. Old philosophers and mythologists
have compared 'the solitary soul to a swan'⁵ which soars up
through the gusty atmosphere. But the image of the soul has
to be tested in those stormy times and it remains to be seen

¹ The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.430.
² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid.
how far this soul-swan can be capable of flying up or winging its way through the "winds that clamour of approaching night"\textsuperscript{1} with its breast thrust bravely in the teeth of their force and fury.

The poet denounces the great who foolishly labour day and night to leave an imperishable legacy behind them, in utter ignorance of Time's destructive fury which brings all things to the same level. Yeats feels disgusted with and mocks "at the great"\textsuperscript{2} who have "such burdens on the mind"\textsuperscript{3} and toil "so hard and late/To leave some monument behind"\textsuperscript{4} but never think "of the levelling wind"\textsuperscript{5}.

Then the mockery extends to the wise who map out the future but do not reckon with the law of change and flux and now have been rendered helpless and bewildered. The poet feels disenchanted with and mocks "at the wise"\textsuperscript{6} who fix their "old aching eyes"\textsuperscript{7} on the "calendars"\textsuperscript{8} and never see "how seasons run"\textsuperscript{9} and simply "gape at the sun"\textsuperscript{10}.

\begin{flushleft}
1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.431.
2. Ibid., p.431.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
Then come the good who seek the real happiness in
their goodness. Likewise the poet mocks "at the good"¹
who fancy that "goodness might be gay./And sick of solitude/
Might proclaim a holiday."²

Then, in the end, the poet mocks at the mockers them-
selves for their negative attitude and miserable failure to
extend a helping hand to the good and the wise, pitted against
the destructive forces.

The poet mocks the "mockers"³ who in his opinion,
are morally degenerated souls:

That would not lift a hand maybe
To help good, wise or great
To bar that foul storm out, for we
Traffic in mockery.⁴

The climax is reached in the last section where the poet, in
lines grave and sonorous and the atmosphere darker and more
terrible than the famous storm scene in Shakespeare's King Lear
or a later poem known as The City of Dreadful Night conjures
up the apocalyptic vision of a civilization being trodden down
by the cruel forces of darkness.

The people are "wearied"⁵ and keep on. "running round

¹ The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 432.
² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid., p. 433.
and round in their course. They break and vanish, and "evils gather a head."

Violence has become pervasive. "Violence upon the roads" has unnerved man. The terrible sidhes, rising under horse (The wild winds) are visible in their wind shire, which like dark phantoms appear and dissolve. These sidhes, known in the Middle Ages as "Merodias' daughters," have returned again and their advent is proclaimed by "A sudden blast of dusty wind" — a symbol of destruction in the Bible; "Thunder of feet" and tumult of images. No mortal according to Irish superstition, could touch them because human contact fill them with "amorous cries" or "angry cries," which prove the mortal's undoing. As this stormy vision vanishes and the scene clears up, the dark image of the notorious Devil of medieval superstition, known as Robert Artisson, emerges in the foreground, with his great black eyes shaded by his "straw-pale locks" — a counter part of the stormy vision.

2. p. 47.
3. p. 49.
4. p. 47.
5. p. 47.
6. p. 47.
7. p. 47.
8. p. 47.
9. p. 47.
10. p. 47.
11. p. 47.
in *The Second Coming*. This was the incubus whom the notorious witch, Lady Kytelar, loved and worshipped and for this infatuation she had to pay with her life in 1374 before the inquisition. Yeats was acquainted with Symons’ poem – *The Dance of Daughters of Herodias*. It is an apocalyptic poem, the most vivid and compelling embodiment of the sensitive poet’s strong reaction to the wanton savagery of his times and his sense of alienation.

But the civilization which actually superseded the classical phase was Christianity and instead of Astraea and Saturn, sponsors of the golden age, there came the turbulence of Asia, the religion inaugurated by the "fierce virgin" (Mary) and "her Star" (Christ) which sent the Roman Empire cowering to its death. This is why the Virgin is called "fierce", with a glance at Virgo and its Star. The "fabulous darkness" is the phrase of Proclus for Christianity, because it upset the discipline of the classical culture. The point is developed in the second song.

Christ, the Saviour, came to this earth out of pity for "man's darkening thought", but his death as a mortal man created a great confusion, because his religion stressed the helplessness of man before God. It was a religion of self-surrender and self-abasement on the part of man. It was the

culmination of a process that started with Babylonian astronomers and mathematicians who separated man and made him subject to an abstract universe. So they were responsible for ushering in Christianity, the cause of confusion in the classical world. Plato and other classical philosophers had separated man and his gods. Man was the measure of all things. But Christ, a god, died like a man (he had the human blood); this mixture of god and man destroyed the humanistic discipline of the Pagan civilization. The point is elaborated in the play Resurrection.

So in the last stanza the poet asserts the dignity of the moral man. All things loved by man are momentary. The love of youth, the dreams of the artist, the enthusiasm of the soldier, pass away as soon as they have been realized in action:

Everything that man esteems
Endures a moment or a day.
Love's pleasure drives his love away,
The painter's brush consumes his dreams;
The herald's cry, the soldier's tread
Exhaust his glory and his might;
Whatever flames upon the night
Man's own resinous heart has fed.

Yet man is a creator, the centre of the universe, and the glory, visible in the dark world outside issues out of his own heart. Man is a great pitiful figure.

In the earlier version of *The Sorrow of Love* "earth's old and weary cry"¹, which has been "hid away"², is restored by a girl with "red mournful lips"³, who brings with her "the whole of the world's tears"⁴ and "all the sorrows of her labouring ships"⁵. The girl is now seen in more tragic perspectives:

Doomed like Odysseus and the labouring ships
And proud as Priam murdered with his peers;⁶

The same idea is carried over to *Her Triumph*. In *A Woman Young and Old*, Yeats saw the same image in more potent perspectives:

And now we stare astonished at the sea,
And a miraculous strange bird shrieks at us.⁷

Here the thrust of the poem is into, and not away from life. The world of convention is identified with the "dragon's will"⁸. But imprisonment is also a protection. It is a refuse from responsibility, the confrontation of the Medusa face of freedom. The chain of social rituals binds man merely by the ankles and though it subjugates his inner nature it is

---
¹ The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.120.
² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid.
⁶ Ibid.
⁷ Ibid., p.534.
⁸ Ibid., p.533.
accepted precisely because it protects that nature from the tormenting questions of how to live at a depth beyond casual existence. Break it and the compromises of daily life are broken; he faces the sea both in its promise and its elemental challenges:

And then you stood among the dragon-rings
I mocked, being crazy, but you mastered it
And broke the chain and set my ankles free,
Saint George or else a pagan Perseus:¹

The astonishment and the fear of freedom, the awakening into miraculous, desolate life are conveyed with the kind of sensitive balance of tensions that makes Yeats' best poetry less argument than embodiment.

To be done with time is indeed the predominant impulse of The Wind among the Reeds and one expressed specifically in poem after poem.

In The Everlasting Voices, the poet asks the "sweet everlasting Voices"² to "be still,"³ and go "to the guards of the heavenly fold"⁴ and "old them wander obeying your will"⁵. The poet aspires for "Flame under flame, till Time be no more"⁶.

---

¹ The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.533.
² Ibid., p.141.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid.
⁶ Ibid.
It is simply because

Time drops in decay.
Like a candle burnt out.¹

.........time and the world are ever in flight;²

.........my heart will bow, when dew
Is dropping sleep, until God burn time,
Before the unlabouring stars and you.³

.........time and the world are ebbing away
In twilights of dew and of fire.⁴

Yeats, in To the Rose upon the Rood of Time wants to preserve
his concern in "common things"⁵ that crave for:

The weak worm hiding down in its small cave,
The field-mouse running by me in the grass;⁶

He is equally interested in "heavy mortal hopes that toil
and pass"⁷. The common things are now viewed in less sympa-
thetic light:

The cry of a child by the roadway, the creak of a
lumbering cart;
The heavy steps of the ploughman, splashing the wintry
mould,
Are wronging your image that blossoms a rose in the
deep of my heart.⁸

¹. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.142.
². Ibid., p.143.
³. Ibid.; p.164.
⁴. Ibid.; p.163.
⁶. Ibid.
⁷. Ibid.
⁸. Ibid., p.143.
He continues:

The wrong of unshapely things is a wrong too great to be told;
I hunger to build them anew and sit on a green knoll apart,
with the earth and the sky and the water, remodel,
like a casket of gold.\(^1\)

The *Shadowy Waters* embodies a world - denying will. Some of Forgaël's remarks can only be described as extraordinarially unmystical:

You are not the world's core. O no, no, no!
That cannot be the meaning of the birds.
You are not its core. My teeth are in the world,
But have not bitten yet.\(^2\)

In *All Things* can Tempt me, the poet is full of disgust for the world which has nothing in its store for the man struggling hard to achieve his cherished goal:

Now nothing but comes readier to the hand
Than this accustomed toil.\(^3\)

The political and personal passion combine in *No Second Troy*, the most celebrated poem in the collection. It starts with an explosive question:

Why should I blame her that she filled my days
with misery,......\(^4\)

---

The petty violence of those who would have "hurled the little streets upon the great,"¹ is scornfully judged and found wanting; but it is only at the climax that the failure snaps into peace. Similarly Maud Gonne is seen in terms of destruction. Her beauty is like "a tightened bow".² She is seen with a mind:

That nobleness made simple as a fire³

The gravity of the challenges of social problems, the psychic maladjustments, the threat of worn out beliefs and the total disintegration of an outmoded culture and lastly the rise of fascism, combine to inspire Yeats' mind to think and feel for a doomed society. The description of a disintegrating social order as well as the sick psychology of the individuals are usually combined with suggestive imagery in a manner that the statement and imagery seem to be closely interlinked with each other:

Those masterful images because complete
Grow in pure mind, but out of what began?
A mound of refuse or the sweepings of a street,
Old kettles, old bottles, and a broken can,
Old iron, old bones, old rags, that raving slut
who keeps the till. Now that my ladder's gone,
I must lie down where all the ladders start,
In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart.⁴

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.256.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p.630.
The petty violence of those who would have "hurled the little streets upon the great" is scornfully judged and found wanting; but it is only at the climax that the failure snaps into peace. Similarly Maud Gonne is seen in terms of destruction. Her beauty is like "a tightened bow." She is seen with a mind:

That nobleness made simple as a fire

The gravity of the challenges of social problems, the psychic maladjustments, the threat of worn out beliefs and the total disintegration of an outmoded culture and lastly the rise of fascism, combine to inspire Yeats' mind to think and feel for a doomed society. The description of a disintegrating social order as well as the sick psychology of the individuals are usually combined with suggestive imagery in a manner that the statement and imagery seem to be closely interlinked with each other:

Those masterful images because complete
Grew in pure mind, but out of what began?
A mound of refuse or the sweepings of a street,
Old bottles, old bottles, and a broken can,
Old iron, old bones, old rags, that raving slut
Who keeps the till. Now that my ladder's gone,
I must lie down where all the ladders start,
In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart.

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 256.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p. 630.
At midnight on the Emperor's pavement flit
Flames that no faggot feeds, nor steel has lit,
Nor storms disturbs, flames begotten of flame,
Where blood-begotten spirits come
And all complexities of fury leave,
Dying into a dance,
An agony of trance,
An agony of flame that cannot singe a sleeve.

An important element in Yeats' vision of history is the myth of the Renaissance. Yeats saw the Renaissance broadly, as a period beginning with Dante and ending with Cromwell, which contained the flowering of the human personality and the human product on a level surpassed only by the age of Pericles. But it also carried its opposite within it, the germ of its own destruction, and the Renaissance collapsed into the fragmentation and formlessness of the modern world amid the turbulence of the seventeenth century. The agents and symbols of this tragic revolution are men like Cromwell and Locke, and Yeats very significantly links both men to the myth of the fall of man, in two later poems The Curse of Cromwell and Fragments. In one, Cromwell becomes the progenitor of the modern fallen condition, as seen by a factive Swiftian traveller:

You ask what I have found, and far and wide I go:
Nothing but Cromwell's house and Cromwell's murderous crew,
The lovers and the dancers are beaten into the clay,
And the tall men and the swordsmen and the horsemen,

where are they?

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.498.
2. Ibid., p.580.
Yeats’ comment on the condition of the traveller is noteworthy:

He is distressed by what he finds that his end, like
Gulliver's, is a conversation with animals, the only
ones who understand his talk.

The traveller continues to say:

I came on a great house in the middle of the night,
Its open lighted doorway and its windows all alight,
And all my friends were there and made me welcome too;
But I woke in an old ruin that the winds howled through;
And when I pay attention I must out and walk
Among the dogs and horses that understand my talk.

And in Fragments the fall from the Renaissance becomes, meta-
pherically, the fall of man from the garden. This time the
villain is played by John Locke:

Locke sank into a swoon;
The Garden died;
God took the spinning-jenny
Out of his side.

Here Yeats’ historical theme is the rise of alienation – the
economic division of man from himself and man from man, a
result of the specialization of labor brought about by indus-
trialisation. Beyond that is the suggestion that when the
garden died, the radical division of faculties in the human
mind took place which Yeats thought characteristic of the
modern world. And by naming Locke as the villain Yeats

1. The Letters of W.B. Yeats, p.773.
2. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.561.
3. ibid., p.439.
placed the garden clearly in the Renaissance, Locke himself is divided in the poem, as if into his own categories of subject and object. As the initiator of enlightenment philosophy, as a Whig, and as a middle-class rationalist, Locke could stand for the root of the leveling democratic and bourgeois domination which Yeats so despised:

Decrepit age that has been tied upon me
As upon a dog's tail?¹

The idea is further intensified by the revision of the preposition:

Decrepit age that has been tied to me
As to a dog's tail?²

A famous passage from Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen shows the real agony - the wound inflicted upon the human soul:

And other comfort were a bitter wound;
To be in love and love what vanishes.
Greeks were but lovers; ................

He asks

But is there any comfort to be found?³

In Fallen Majesty what is more tragic and nerve breaking is that:

¹. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.409.
². Ibid.
³. Ibid., p.429.
⁴. Ibid.
A crowd
Will gather, and not know it walks the very street
Whereon a thing once walked that seemed a burning cloud.  

In *The Second Coming*, the poet is harassed and oppressed by the demoralising challenges of this materialistic world. He tries to escape to the world of virtue unaffected by the corrupt and vicious practices of this world:

The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?  

Yet, almost simultaneously, the statue to which the humans bring their love in Yeats' poem *The Statues* blights with the coldness of the corpse. The image in the first stanza of "boys and girls" kissing a stone face reveals the balked emotions responsible for alienation in society:

And pressed at midnight in some public place
Live lips upon a plummet-measured face.  

This kind of statue, far from helping to give birth to a new race and civilization paralyzes life by its indifference to the human. It recalls *The Statues* in *The Living Beauty* "indifferent to our solitude". But in *The Statues* Yeats

---

4. *Ibid*.
turns his lovers back toward the statue, and not to a statue softened in any way, but one whose face is deliberately cold. In A Bronze Head, even the statue of Maud Gonne finds this society a place unfit for human inhabitance. There is "nothing to make its terror less," except "Hysterica passio of its own emptiness." Moreover, a "vision of terror" has "shattered her soul." "Propinquity" has brought her

Imagination to that pitch where it casts out
All that is not itself.

She wonders if there is anything "left for massacre to save." Thus, nothing in the world is good enough for her.

In The Wanderings Of Oisin, "bent, and bald, and blind," Oisin makes his complaint to a disdainful Patrick, the representative of a new civilization that has displaced the old heroic life of the Fenians. He says:

And now I am dizzy with the thought
Of all that wisdom and the fame
Of battles broken by his hands,
Of stories built by his words
That are like coloured Asian birds
At evening in their rainless lands.

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 618.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 619.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., p. 2.
He continues:

But when I sang of human joy
A sorrow wrapped each merry face,
And, Patrick! by your beard, they wept,
Until one came, a tearful boy;
'A sadder creature never slept
Than this strange human bard', he cried;
And caught the silver harp away,
And, weeping over the white strings, hurled
It down in a leaf-hid, hollow place
That kept dim waters from the sky;
And each one said, with a long, long sigh,
'O saddest harp in all the world
Sleep there till the moon and the stars die!'

The modern civilization has brought about a complete change
in social set up. The state of normlessness has drained away
the vital energy of man. Man is not in a state to temper the
streak of disintegrating forces in society:

An old man stirs the fire to a blaze,
in the house of a child, of a friend, of a brother;
He has ever lingered his welcome; the days,
Grown desolate, whisper and sigh to each other;
He hears the storm in the chimney above,
And bends to the fire and shakens with the cold.

Oisin goes 'on the bell-branch, sleep's forebear, far sung
by the Bennachieis' and wonders 'how those slumberers'
have 'grown weary' fighting 'with the wide world' and
'pacing the shores of the wandering seas'. Thus 'with

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.17.
2. Ibid., p.20.
3. Ibid., p.30.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
weariness more than of earth'', the ''moil'' of centuries fill him and pass off ''like a sea - covered stone''.

Niamh, then, puts a question:

O flaming lion of the world, O when will you turn to your rest?

Thus, tortured by the agonies of life, she moans:

I would die like a small withered leaf in the autumn,
for breast unto breast
we shall mingle no more, nor our gazes empty their
sweetness lone-

She must go and reside:

In the Isles of the farthest seas where only the spirit come.
Were the winds less soft than the breath of a pigeon
who sleeps on her nest, Nor lost in the star-fires and odours the sound of the sea's vague drum?

Oisin, after listening to the moan, starts riding by ''the plains of the sea's edge, where all is barren and grey''.

The final lines of The Wanderings of Oisin are indeed a curse upon old age but they also contain certain other elements which are particularly interesting in the present context:

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.51.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p.56.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
Ah me! to be shaken with coughing and broken with old age and pain, without laughter, a show unto children, alone with remembrance and fear; 1

The thematic mix in these lines - age, children, remembrance, fear - remind us of the identical themes and concerns of Among School Children thirty five years later.

Alienation, the fragment torn from the whole, is of course one of the major themes in Among School Children. Stanza one opens on a note of isolation with a self-conscious speaker in the role of visitor. The "kind old nun" 2 is a separate individual, too. The children stare at the visitor and the gulf between them widens. The theme is resumed in the second stanza with the beloved as hurt swan, ironized by the memory of a moment of "yolk and white" 3 oneness they had known as youthful lovers. Her "present image" 4, fiercely beautiful in the manner of emaciated saint, extends the theme which is countered by the tender picture of a "youthful mother" 5 with "a shape upon her lap" 6. It is further countered by the abrupt image of her son "with sixty or more winters on its head" 7. The theme now broadens to

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 63.
2. Ibid., p. 443.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p. 444.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
include the philosophers whose rationalist systems have succeeded in alienating so many generations from world and nature alike. The nuns and mothers of the next stanza, breaking their hearts over adored images complete the catalogue of instances: All suddenly confronted - or rather, reproved by the two powerful images of integration and harmony, the "chestnut-tree"\(^1\) and "the dancer"\(^2\), in the final lines. Structurally, the poem is a sustained elaborate counterpointing of two of Yeats' lifelong interdependent themes: alienation and unity of being.

In stanza six of the poem what is being dismissed is plainly Aristotelian categorization and methodology in the natural sciences, philosophy, the arts - the occidental compulsion to fragment, systematize and pigeon-hole the world. Aristotle of the discarded passage is, in fact, antagonist par excellence, arch-systematizer-ur-scarecrow-of-the west. what the school children are learning is "To cut and sew, be neat in everything/In the best modern way"\(^3\). Viewed alongside the un-neat, un-modern chestnut tree is Elementary School Aristotelianism leading inevitably to the compartmentalizing of the world.

\(1.\) The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.446. 
\(2.\) Ibid. 
\(3.\) Ibid., p.443.
The opposite of cut-and-sew knowledge which the children are learning and of which the systems of Plato and Aristotle are exemplary instances, is that implied by the chestnut tree and the dancer immersed in her dance and her music, the ideal vehicles for the poem’s climatic thought—which is that knowledge consists not in objects known or defined but in the process of knowing those objects, knower and known are united in one unitary act of consciousness. Victorian and early modern theories of education, grounding themselves on an objects known approach, had inculcated mastery of separate bodies of knowledge. Yeats is clearly opposed, in this poem, to all such theories of education. Yet here arise certain poignant ironies. In repudiating systematization, he must also repudiate its representatives within the poem: the nun, and her Thomistic system; the beloved, considered as an avatar of Maud Gonne and the political systems that have wasted her; the narrator himself, as mask of the poet who had just completed a pedantic system of his own, and who as Irish senator was currently assisting in the making of new governmental institutions. Completely self-fulfilling, they exist entirely within the present. Schools, on the other hand, religious schools especially, are oriented to the past. Tree and dancer are everything that they do; their soul (essences) are indistinguishable from the movements of their bodies. Schools are places where one learns to divide and portion the self where
body is "bruised to pleasure soul". In these ways tree and dancer call in question the very institution of the classroom, with its structured approach to knowledge. But because of stanza VI they do even more: they call in question, in vintage Yeatsean fashion, nothingless than the intellectual history of the west from Greek times to the present—a long schoolroom indeed, through which not only the meditative narrator but by now also the reader walk questioning.

One of the poem's most important ghosts, with a long history in Yeats' work, is the theme of spiritual solitude vs. action in the world. It is already present in the very early The Song of the Happy Shepherd in the opposition of private "dreams" and "dusty deeds"; one finds it in The two Trees, in which a beloved is urged to turn from worldly pursuits and gaze "in thine own heart"; in Ego Dominus Luus, with its studied antithesis of self and world; in The Grey Rock, in which infidelity to the muse for any worldly cause whatsoever is presented as treason; or again, in In Memory of Major Robert Gregory, a disguised reprise of The Grey Rock theme; and so on.

The perennial antithesis, private solitude vs. service to the world, is carried in Among School Children, by each of

2. Ibid., p. 37.
3. Ibid., p. 65.
4. Ibid., p. 135.
three principals — the nun, the narrator, the beloved. The nun is solitary in virtue of her sacred calling, yet a public figure as the representatives of the school that is being visited. The narrator is solitary as subjective intelligence immersed in private reveries, yet a public person as a state inspector of education and, insofar as he is a projection of the poet himself, Irish senator and Noble laureate. The beloved is solitary as a "ledaean"¹ beauty; yet insofar as she is a version of Maud Gonne, she is also a public figure, cheeks scooped from living on fantasies of ideal, political utopias and basing her hopes on the illiterate masses. Moreover, each of the principals is isolated from the others. The sensual overtones in "Ledaean body"² separate the beloved from the ascetic Christian nun. The doctrine of the soul's reminiscence and forgetting pondered by the narrator in the stanza V, in worlds removed from the doctrine of the divine origin of the soul is subscribed to by the nun. The sixty year old narrator is separated not only from the beloved, both as she once was and as she now is, but also from the youthful lover whom he remembers as having "'Had pretty plumage once'"³.

At the same time, certain things bind them together in spite of the differences, Professional solitaries, each is the

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 444.
2. Ibid., p. 443.
3. Ibid., p. 444.
antithesis of a system dedicated to the making of good citizens-integrated, smiling public men and women. Again, each is a figure of repressed, deflected or transposed sexuality - a common exigency that sets them apart, almost as a polarized group, from the blithe dancer and the flourishing chestnut tree. Color imagery unites them in other ways: the white hood of the nun, the narrator's hair, the white plumage of the swan, the Ledaean body of the beloved, the chestnut blossoms, the bright dancer in her pool of light - all reflect or invoke each other - perhaps generate each other: for although the nun is a "scarecrow", attired in her white hood and surrounded by her "paddler's" she is also a swan, indeed, it is her "white hood", in the second line of the poem, that brings into the narrator's mind the body of the beloved to reappear at the poem's close at the dancer's body image of ideal perfection and self-fulfilment - so opposite to the figure of the kind old nun, whose white hood, however, had initiated all these reveries.

Ghosts from the immediate context haunt the poem in the form of precursings, mirroring, repetitions of its leading themes. Fragments anticipates the opposition of scarecrows vs. chestnut tree by that of Lockean civilization

---

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 444.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 443.
vs. some rich ordering of life. In *Leda and the Swan*, the girl and divine swan are begetting the heroic age of Greece, the white body of Leda and pleated, outspread wings of the swan all commenting on the pleated, white hood of the nun, the stiff figure on the crucifix she wears or worships, and the studious little pupils busily practising being neat in everything. Most of the main themes in *The Tower* are, in fact, in one way or another resumed in the poem — aging and its appropriate wisdom, reminiscences of youth, disappointed love, aristocratic tradition vs. the opposing commonness, pagan vs. Christian values, solitude vs. public service etc. Many of the volume's richest images and symbols, tower, great house-tree, fountain, dancers, swans, have elements in common that almost make them versions of each other: verticality, or loftiness (physical, personal, national) ascendability (stairs, successive landings, fountain basins, the passing centuries, the tiers of branches); rootedness (house, tree, national cultural tradition); ornamentation and illumination (the blossoming tree, the lamplit tower, God's holy fire). The Tower itself, whose "midnight candle" ¹ is visible for miles, denotes not merely aloofness, or arrogance, but lordliness, abstruse thought, and "wisdom", ² which is "mysterious" ³

¹ *The Poems of W.B. Yeats*, p.420.
and makes "a man's soul or a woman's soul/Itself and not some other soul". It is, thus, a variant form of Byzantium; but it is also a variant of the chestnut tree, crowded with candle-light brightness and rising, like the tree, from the soil of centuries. Again, both tower and tree are for an instant repeated in the "dizzy high" fountain of Ancestral Houses which reflect the glory of the rich. All of these images, of loftiness, certainty, authority, learning, order, are surrounded - or are they negated? - by an almost impenetrable mark:

......................................somewhere
A man is killed, or a house burned,
Yet no clear fact to be discerned:
Come build in the empty house of the stare.

The schoolroom itself is, of course, an ambivalent image, inasmuch as it is the common setting, or soundingboard, for every theme in the poem; but it also fits into series. The long schoolroom and the tower are both structures negotiable by stages. There are halting places in both - for questions or reveries. Both are concerned with preserving and passing on the cultural tradition. Intellectual adventures - "bear-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil". Distinguished persons, living and dead, turn up in both. Since the children are paddlers

2. Ibid., p.417.
3. Ibid., p.425.
4. Ibid., p.446.
and one or two of them may even be swans, the schoolroom is also a pond, or lake, or ancestral estate. And since they practise singing, they are song birds, the classroom their singing-tree. As they are future citizens, it is a tree of state: will it flourish, or will it end up "Half dead at the top>? The Tower is so loaded with issues and questions of this kind, is so pedagogically obsessed, that the classroom setting seems not only appropriate to this one poem but to the volume as a whole as its presiding image, with great house, chestnut tree, and tower itself as individual variants.

The last suggestion isn't as whimsical as it might appear to be. The pedagogical side of Yeats was always very prominent—witness all the reviews, introductions, essays, speculative and critical studies he wrote, the controversies he engaged in, the lectures and speeches on behalf of the arts which he made, and his continuous efforts to reform public taste in Ireland—years of work, very much resembling that of a schoolmaster, or an inspector of Irish cultural institutions. Similar concerns thread through the poetry. The Tower opens with a prayer to sages to come and "be the singing-masters of my soul" and ends in an achieved wisdom. But The Song of the Happy Shepherd points to the agony of the school boy:

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 480.
2. Ibid., p. 408.
where are now the warring kings?
An idle word is now their glory,
By the stammering schoolboy said,
Reading some entangled story?¹

The schoolroom setting fits such a wide range of themes in Yeats' entire work that it seems the ideal setting for most of it. Practically anything he had ever cared about, fought for, fought against would be immediately available to him in such a setting, and in fact many of his most characteristic themes are antipathies: Youth, age, imagination, abstraction, unity of being, fragmentation, spontaneity, system, spiritual agony, solitude, public service, organicism, mechanism, the beloved ones, and the uselessness of human knowledge, radical innocence, the pragmatic pig of the world, the land of heart's desire.

The theme continues to appear in Yeats' work. It is in The Land of Heart's Desire, The Lake of Innisfree and The Mystical Rose of the Nineties. It is The Happy Townland, where:

\[
\text{boughs have their fruit and blossom}
\text{At all times of the year;}
\text{rivers are running over}
\text{with red beer and brown beer \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots.²}
\]

It is a place where wandering Aengus will walk

¹. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 63.
². Ibid., p. 214.
And walk among long dappled grass,
And pluck till time and times are done
The silver apples of the moon,
The golden apples of the sun.  

In A Vision, it is the central antithetical phase (15) of the System, where "Thought and will are indistinguishable, effort and attainment are indistinguishable; and this is the consummation of a slow process; nothing is apparent but dreaming Will and the Image that it dreams. Now contemplation and desire, united into one, inhabit a world where every beloved image has bodily form, and every bodily form is loved...." 2, a supernatural unity in which Helen Vendler finds "something" that has begun to take on the quality of a lost Paradise." 3. It has affinities with Byzantium. One is summoned and conducted to both places, and must cross seas to get to there. Both are abodes of spiritual beings. Exquisite bird-song is heard in both. Moonlight is part of the magic of both places. Rites and rituals have in both a central importance. Both disdain the unpurged world of ordinary human life.

Outraged criticism of those who continue to live appears in satiric elegies. In September 1913, the poet laments his inability to "turn the years again" 4 and "call those exiles

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 150.
as they were/in all their loneliness and pain.¹ In To a Shade, a man of "passionate serving kind"² is "driven from the place"³ and is met with a humiliating situation:

And insult heaped upon him for his pains,
And for his open-handedness, disgrace;⁴

The poet, therefore, advises him:

Go, unquiet, wanderer
And gather the Glazovin coverlet
About your head till the dust stops your ear,
The time for you to taste of that salt breath
And listen at the corners has not come;
You had enough of sorrow before death—
Away, away! you are safer in the tomb.⁵

Yeats' satiric ambiguity is at its highest when he mocks the paudeens - too careful to weigh their goods lightly. He says:

For men were born to pray and save.⁶

He continues:

And what, God help us, Could they save?⁷

He adds:

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.290.
2. Ibid., p.292.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., p.299.
7. Ibid.
They weighed so lightly what they gave.  

The poet condemning their ignorance and greed:

  what need you, being come to sense,  
  but fumble in a greasy till  
  And add the halfpence to the pence.  

He feels disgusted with this kind of attitude and asks them:

  Was it for this the wild geese spread  
  The grey wing upon every tide?  

In Shepherd and Goatherd, two radically different personalities, representing youth and age meet and converse. Disgusted by the hue and cry of the world the Shepherd wishes to hear the cry that comes from "the first cuckoo of the year"; because as he says: "Something has troubled me." Goatherd still more puzzled and agitated by the corroding worries of life says:

    Nor bird nor beast  
    Could make me wish for anything this day.  

On the contrary the boy who died in "the great war beyond the sea" sent a rustle of excitement through Goatherd's

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 290.  
2. Ibid., p. 289.  
3. Ibid., p. 290.  
4. Ibid., p. 338.  
5. Ibid., p. 339.  
6. Ibid., p. 338.  
body when he played upon his pipe in complete loneliness:

He had often played his pipes among my hills,
And when he played it was their loneliness,
The exultation of their stone, that cried
Under his fingers. 1

The death of a respected local landowner (Robert Gregory) is the cause of their meeting, and they exchange a poem in honor of the dead man. Each herdsman appears to find the other's lyric profoundly moving. The solitary Goatherd is reminded by the Shepherd's song of the human society of his youth:

......I that made like music in my youth
Hearing it now have sighed for that young man
And certain lost companions of my own. 2

Shepherds timidity and self doubt are expressed in the following lines:

I worked all day,
And when'twas done so little had I done
That may be 'I am sorry' in plain prose
Had sounded better to your mountain fancy. 3

They are apparently, cured by exposure to the Goatherd's mystic faith - "Knowledge he shall unwind/Through victories of the mind" 4. The feel that:

All knowledge lost in trance
Of sweeter ignorance. 5

2. Ibid., p.342.
3. Ibid., p.341.
4. Ibid., p.343.
5. Ibid.
Together they set out to relieve themselves of the demoralizing challenges of life and seek solace in the world of nature:

\[ \ldots \ldots \text{we'll to the woods and there} \]
\[ \text{Cut out our rhymes on strips of new-torn bark} \]
\[ \text{But put no name and leave them at her door}. \]

Yeats' dreams were, initially, dreams of islands. 'I am haunted by numberless islands, and many a Danaan shore/Where Time would surely forget us, and Sorrow come near us no more',\(^2\), cries the lover in *The White Birds*, an early poem. The early Yeats was indeed haunted by islands: besides *The Island of Statues* there was Oisin's odyssey to the three islands and islands in many poems, all traditionally used as places out of Time where Yeats, conventionally, located his faeryland. But just as Yeats needed to sail the seas—literally and metaphorically—from his own island to other continents, so islands began to disappear from his poetry, and in *The Circus Animal's Desertion*, 'sea-rider Oisin'\(^3\) is recalled as having been ''led by the nose''\(^4\) through such islands as are humanly unendurable. They are vain because, as also in the Odyssey, Time is also Memory which brings men back to what they have abandoned: country, soil, wife, child—joy and sorrow. Eternal peace is for Oisin, as far Odysseus, the promise of uncertain happiness, and it is indeed Sorrow which

\[ \text{1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 349.} \]
\[ \text{2. Ibid., p. 122.} \]
\[ \text{3. Ibid., p. 629.} \]
\[ \text{4. Ibid.} \]
beckons Oisin to return to the real world, and to abandon the dreams of the islands.

Fortunately *Master 1916* is not a poem of sackcloth and ashes; it is a poem deeply troubled by the knowledge that heroic action can have more than one implication. The middle-class men coming from "counter or desk"¹ known only in the exchange of "polite meaningless words"², the schoolmaster who once belonged to "the noisy set/Of bankers, schoolmasters, and clergymen/The Martyrs call the world"³, "A drunken vainglorious lout"⁴ who had bitterly wronged those close to Yeats' heart, are all capable of a deeper life below the "motley"⁵ and the "casual comedy"⁶, a radical transformation of their appearance. But the deeper life is a divided life. Hearts dominated by a single purpose are "Enchanted to a stone"⁷ troubling the living stream. The word "Enchanted" minimises the apparent disapproval and in the vital central image, where the "Minute-by-minute" life of the stream is perfectly seized in the description and movement, the sudden recognition comes that heroic action, however obsessed, is

---

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.392.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p.204.
4. Ibid., p.393.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
inexorably part of the life that it troubles:

Minute by minute they live;
The stone's in the midst of all.¹

As this point, indeed, the manipulation of the imagery gives the stone permanency in the midst of transience, and, with the very next line ''Too long a sacrifice/Can make a stone of the heart''² underlining the other evocations of ''stone'', the balance is complete and fully achieved poetically. It is characteristic of the subtlety of the imaginative reasoning that the heart's stoniness is born of the emotional fervour of sacrifice, but, characteristically also, this implication is cut back before it can develop to the detriment of the balance:

And what if excess of love
Bewildered them till they died?³

The poem is, in fact, typical of Yeats' achievement, in which the images in the poetic organization both challenge and amend each other, creating a total life that exists only and fully in the terms that are chosen. In these circumstances the refrain

A terrible beauty is born⁴

is not as an escape from full realisation or a lapse into

---

¹ The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.393.
² Ibid., p.394.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
something like Yeats’ earlier manner, but a consummation of the forces at work in the poem. With *Easter 1916* and with *Responsibilities* behind him, Yeats has completed his emancipation from the twilight, has securely achieved the self-conquest that is style and has fought his way into the twentieth century social psychology.

Thus, we find that a general spiritual decay, disruption of social values, disintegrating social order, diseased psychology of individuals, mechanization of life, psychic maladjustment, nerve breaking social problems, lack of self-love, sinister glamour overshadowing the sensibilities of man, falsity and sense of rootlessness prevalent in the modern mechanized world create in Yeats a sense of alienation from a society which is rotten to the core.

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