CHAPTER-III

POLITICAL ALIENATION

W.B. Yeats feels that the increasing gulf between the individual and the state generates a conflict, tension and disharmony between the political power and the various forms of political authorities intermediate between the individual and the state. This conflict, Yeats sees, is inevitable as it is intolerable and is born of the plurality of man's allegiances of man. Yeats believes that what has passed for political thought has often been radically apolitical. The "Soldier, assassin and executioner" ¹ standing on "blood-saturated ground" ² , "blind fear" ³ , "abstract hatred" ⁴ and "Odour of blood on the ancestral stair" ⁵ make the poet doubt if "every modern nation" ⁶ is like "the tower" ⁷ that is "Half dead at the top" ⁸. In Hound Voice, the poet portrays the greed and callousness of man:

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.482.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
Some day we shall get up before the dawn
And find our ancient hounds before the door,
And wide awake know that the hunt is on;
Stumbling upon the blood-dark track once more,
Then stumbling to the kill beside the shore;
Then cleaning out and bandaging of wounds,
And chants of victory amid the encircling hounds.¹

Yeats was a public figure for more than forty years deeply immersed in political interests, politically active whenever opportunity presented itself. His best poetry has often apolitical theme, sometime a political intent. His political thoughts deserve to be taken more seriously than they have been. They are not fundamentally inconsistent, vague or irrelevant to his real self and are, in his maturity and old age, generally pro-Fascist in tendency, and Fascist in practice. He writes: 'In politics I have but one passion and one thought, rancour against all who, except under the most dire necessity, disturb public order, a conviction that public order cannot long persist without the rule of educated and able men.'²

His attitude towards politics is best explained by him in a note on Leda and the Swan:

¹. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 622.
². Ibid., p. 543.
I wrote Leda and the Swan because the editor of a political review asked me for a poem. I thought 'After the individualist, demagogic movement founded by Rousseau and popularized by the Encyclopædists and the French revolution, we have a soil too exhausted that it cannot grow that crop again for centuries'. Then I thought 'Nothing is now possible but some movement from above preceded by some violent annunciation!' My fancy began to play with Leda and the Swan for metaphor, and I began this poem; but as I wrote, bird and lady took such possession of the scene that all politics went out of it, and my friends tells me that his conservative readers would misunderstand the poem'.

They would have been puzzled certainly:

A sudden blow: the great wings beating still
Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed
By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.

How can those terrified vague fingers push
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?
And how can body, laid in that white rush,
But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?

Yeats' profound and tragic, intuitive and intelligent awareness, in his maturity and old age, of what the First World War had set loose, of what was already moving towards Hitler and the Second World War is clear from a letter written as early as 1923: 'Unless Europe takes to war again and starts new telepathic streams of violence and cruelty'.

2. Ibid., p.441.
The words "'hate'" and "'fanaticism'" became keywords in Yeats' poetry. He often uses them in condemnation of the left in Irish politics — the politics of Constance Markievicz and of Maud Gonne:

I thought my dear must her own soul destroy,
So did fanaticism and hate enslave it.¹

But he is also increasingly conscious of these same forces himself:

Out of Ireland have we come.
Great hatred, little room,
Malmed us at the start.
I carry from my mother's womb
A fanatic heart.²

The "'fanatic heart'", an unusual capacity for hatred and an unusual experience of it, probably made him more sensitive and more responsive to the telepathic waves coming from Europe than other writers in English seem to have been. The forces in him that responded to the hatred, cruelty and violence welling up in Europe produced in him a sense of alienation. In Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen he says:

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.630.
2. Ibid., p.506.
He who can read the signs nor sink unmanned
Into the half-deceit of some intoxicant
From shallow wits; who knows no work can stand,
Whether health, wealth or peace of mind were spent
On master-work of intellect or hand,
No honour leave its mighty monument,
Has but one comfort left: all triumph would
But break upon his ghostly solitude.¹

In the poetry, however, the raw intimations of what is
impending the telepathic waves of violence and fear make them-
selves known, not in the form of calculated practical deduct-
ions, but in the attempt to reveal, through metamorphic
insight, what is actually happening and even, in a broad
sense, what is about to happen. The poet, like the lady,
is

          ................. so caught up,
          So mastered by the brute blood of the air,²

that he does indeed take on the knowledge of what is happen-
ing with the power to make it known. The political man had
his cautious understanding with Fascism, the diplomatic
relation to a great face; the poet conveyed the nature of
the force, the dimension of the tragedy. The impurities of
this long and extraordinary life went into its devious and
sometimes sinister political theories and activities. The
purity and integrity — including the truth about politics as

¹. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 429.
². Ibid., p. 441.
He who can read the signs nor sink unmanned
Into the half-deceit of some intoxicant
From shallow wits; who knows no work can stand,
Whether health, wealth or peace of mind were spent
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¹. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.429.
². Ibid., p.441.
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purity and integrity — including the truth about politics as

¹. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 429.
². Ibid., p. 441.
of the leaders of the 1916 Rebellion. In *Sixteen Dead Men*, he says:

You say that we should still the land
Till Germany's overcome;
But who is there to argue that
Now pearse is deaf and dumb?
And is their logic to outweigh
MacDonagh's bony thumb?¹

At the bottom of it all was the Anglo-Irish predicament. The Irish Protestant stock from which Yeats came was no longer a ruling class but still a superior caste, and thought of itself in this way. His people were in the habit of looking down on their Catholic neighbours - the majority of those among whom they lived - and this habit Yeats never entirely lost. But when he went to school in England Yeats was to find, as Parnell and others had found, that this distinction had lost much of its validity. Unsophisticated Englishmen - including all the young-made no great distinction between Protestant-Irish and Catholic-Irish. The Irish were known by their brogue - which in Yeats' case must have been quite marked at this stage - and they were all comic, inferior and "mad".² Among the sophisticated classes these categories found gentler nuances: witty, impractical, imaginative. The Irish Protestant, thus, acquired two basic bits of information: the important thing about him,

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¹ *The Poems of W.B. Yeats*, p. 395.
in relation to Ireland, was that he was a Protestant; in relation to England, that he was an Irishman. This duality was the characteristic feature of the community to which Yeats belonged: "Everyone I knew well in Sligo" he wrote "despised Nationalists and Catholics but all disliked England...."

The prudent Yeats, the sound calculator of chances, is as it seems the manager of the poet. A poet, if he is to survive long enough to be recognized as a great poet, has need of such a manager. The poet is drawn to nationalism by a deep sense of injured dignity and by a hatred proportionate to his power: hatred always strong in him, and with pride the strongest of his political emotions. There are moments, he wrote, when hatred (of England in the context) poisons my life and I accuse myself of effeminacy because I have not given it adequate expression. Yeats, the manager was always there to see that he gave it just the right degree of expression for any given time.

Elsewhere he speaks of Four Bells, four deep tragic notes in Irish history, the first being the war that ended in the Flight of the Earls (1603), the fourth being the death of Parnell in 1891:

I heard the first note of the Fourth Bell forty years ago on a stormy October morning. I had gone to Kingston Pier to meet the Mail Boat that arrived about 6 a.m. I was expecting a friend, but met what I thought much less of at the time, the body of Parnell.  

The friend was, of course, Maud Gonhe, who came over on the boat that brought Parnell's body back to Ireland.

In the first years of Yeats' involvement in active politics, there had been special circumstances making political life among Irish nationalists tolerable for a Protestant: by 1900 these special circumstances had disappeared. The fall of Parnell had produced as well as a clerical party, led by Dillon, an anti-clerical Parnellite party led by John Redmond. Parnellite circles — to which Yeats had directed his first appeal, and which probably made up the larger part of his audiences — were distinguished by a scarcity of priests and a minimum of priestly authority. It was not that he necessarily hated priests himself — though he certainly did not like them — but that an atmosphere of priestly authority, in which for example priests tended to be arbiters of taste, was inimical to Protestant and poet. This atmosphere was temporarily dissipated in a considerable part of Ireland, including Dublin, in 1891, and Yeats must have found the

1. Commentary on the poem Parnell's Funeral
   The Poems of W.B. Yeats, P.834.
going relatively easy then. By 1900, however, with the re-
unification of the Irish party and the burying of the
Parnellite hatchet - which was an anti-clerical hatchet -
the clergy had recovered most of their former authority, and
life among nationalists must have become proportionately
depressing for Protestants. It was already depressing enough,
for reasons of class. Yeats has left us a collective picture
of his political associates of the 'nineties: 'Men who had
risen above the traditions of the countryman, without learn-
ing those of cultivated life, or even educating themselves
and who because of their poverty, their ignorance, their super-
stitious piety, are much subject to all kinds of fear' 1.

This is a classical statement of the Irish Protestant
view of the rising Catholic middle-class. From this class
Yeats was now recoiling and the violence of his recoil did
much to determine the political direction of his later years.

Snobbery - abhorring the multitude - was then a more
acceptable, and therefore comfortable, attitude than it now
would be. A hero of Francois Mauriac's after a day spent
among workers in some Christian Socialist movement turned
into a snob. Now that he had withdrawn for the time from
active politics, politics became explicit in his poetry. His

bitterness about Maud Gonne's marriage took a political form:

...............that she would of late
have taught to ignorant men most violent ways. ¹

If the snobbery endemic in his class and generation
takes in his writing from now on an almost hysterical inten-
sity, it is because that he felt himself to have undergone,
in his political years, a kind of contamination, a loss of
caste, through ''the contagion of the throng'' and that, in
the end he had suffered a deep injury to his pride. ''One
must accept'' - he had written to Lady Gregory near the end
of his political involvement - ''the baptism of the gutter''².
In the same letter in which he accepted the baptism of the
gutter, he spoke of trying to get someone to resign from some-
thing in favour of MacBride of the Irish Brigade - the man
whom Maud Gonne was to marry three years later. There were
moments when he felt ashamed of his hate, but it proved
enduring. Hatred of England had been with him early; hatred
of the base in Ireland now joined it. The two hates represent-
ed an abnormal intensification of the normal dualism of the
Irish Protestant. They formed an unstable and potentially
explosive combination: a volcanic substance which would from time
to time erupt through the surface of Yeats' public life. A

¹. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.256.

In later years he liked to tell the story of the speaker
at the Socialist picnic: 'I was brought up a gentleman
and now as you can see associate with all sorts'.
conservative admirer of Yeats could reasonably have expected to find him in Dublin Lock-out in 1913 on the side of public order, the rights of property and the rule of the educated. What Yeats did, however, was to come out explicitly and vehemently against the activities of the employers' principal allies - police, press and clergy. His protest, in the form of a letter to Larkin's *Irish Worker*, is important enough to show how politically alienated did he stand:

And I charge the Unionist Press of Dublin and those who directed the police with conniving at the conspiracy. I want to know why the Daily Express, which is directly and indirectly inciting Ulster to rebellion in defence of what it calls 'the liberty of the subject' is so indifferent to that liberty here in Dublin that it has not made one editorial comment, and I ask the Irish Times why a few sentences at the end of an article, too late in the week to be of any service, has been the measure of its love for civil liberty?

I want to know why there were only (according to the press reports) two policemen at Kingbridge on Saturday when Mr. Sheehy Skeffington was assaulted and a man prevented from buying a ticket for his own child? There had been tumults every night at every Dublin railway station, and I can only assume that the police authorities wished those tumults to continue.

I want to know why the mob at North Wall and elsewhere were permitted to drag children from their parents' arms, and by what right one woman was compelled to open her box and show a marriage certificate; I want to know by what right to police have refused to accept charges against rioters; I want to know who has ordered the abrogation of the most elementary rights of the citizens, and why authorities who are bound to protect every man in doing that which he has a legal right to do - even though they have to call upon all the forces of the Crown - have permitted the Ancient Order of Hibernians to besiege Dublin, taking possession to the railway stations like a foreign army.
Prime Ministers have fallen, and Ministers of State have been impeached for less than this. I demand that the coming Police Inquiry shall be so widened that we may get to the bottom of a conspiracy, whose like has not been seen in any English-speaking town during living memory. Intrigues have met together somewhere behind the scenes that they might turn the religion of Him who thought it hard for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven into an oppression of the poor. 1

The immediate occasion for the attack - the art gallery controversy - was aesthetic, but the roots of the controversy, and its emotional charge, were social and political and - in the communal sense - religious. It is true that the poet attacked the Sullivan gang for its philistinism - and Murphy's Irish Independent was indeed, and long remained, a philistine bastion - but he had hated them long before any artistic controversy arose; in any case the Sullivan clan were certainly intellectually well above the level of the Irish middle-class as a whole (both Protestant and Catholic) and, aesthetically, did not lag conspicuously behind the upper class generally.

Yeats' intervention in the 1913 industrial conflict came just at the moment when the leader of the obnoxious class brought the obnoxious method to bear. Murphy, supported in this by Archbishop Walsh, had enlisted clerical aid to prevent children of the Dublin workers from being sent to the homes

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1. Dublin Fanaticism, Irish Worker, Nov. 1913, Jim Larkin and the Dublin Lock-out.
of English sympathizers. From the Archbishop's point of view the children's departure involved a danger to their faith: from Murphy's point of view it represented a danger to his economic blockade. If the children were not on hand, to go hungry - and be seen and heard to go hungry - then the men might be able to hold out and Larkin would win. So the cry - the faith in danger - was used to starve children.

Yeats' indignation at the saving of the children was spontaneous, comprehensible and creditable. It does not constitute - an isolated pro-working-class outbreak, unique in his career. It was in no way inconsistent with his Protestant/aristocratic position to attack the leaders of the rising Catholic middle-class, and their clerical allies, or to defend their victims. These leaders and that alliance had long inspired in him distrust and repugnance - feelings which 1913 fanned into flame. **September 1913 reflects the idea:**

> Yet they were of a different kind,  
> The names that stilled your childish play,  
> They have gone about the world like wind,  
> But little time had they to pray  
> For whom the hangman's rope was spun,

These feelings in themselves were habitual in the class from which he himself sprang. Other members of that class could, however, muffle the expression of those feelings when, as

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now, it suited their economic interest to do so — that is, the meaning of the charge of connivance which Yeats directs against the Irish Times and Daily Express. Yeats himself could do some muffling at times, but when the provocation was great — as now — he had to give vent to his feelings, against the formidable alliance of savings and prayers:

And prayer to shivering prayer, until
You have dried the marrow from the bone? 1

The poems Easter 1916, Sixteen Dead Men, The Rose Tree and On a Political Prisoner drew strength from the complexity as well as from the intensity of the emotions involved — the sense — which became explicit years after — of his own share in the gestation of the event; the presence in the event of the strongest love and the strongest personal hatred of his life; an old hate and even a kind of disgust, for much of what the insurrection meant

Blind and leader of the blind
Drinking the foul ditch where they lie? 2

an even older and deeper hate for those who crushed the insurrection; and finally a prophetic sense of the still more bitter struggle yet to come:

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 289.
2. Ibid., p. 397.
But who can talk of give and take,
what should be and what not
while those dead men are loitering there
To stir the boiling pot?¹

By the time when Easter 1916 and The Rose Tree were published, in the autumn of 1920, the pot had boiled over. The Black and Tan terror was now at its height throughout Ireland. To publish these poems in this context was a political act, and a bold one: probably the boldest of Yeats' career. Yeats' indignation was spontaneous: his method of giving expression to that indignation in his published writings seems calculated.

The spirit of the Proclamation of the Republic was in them:

'Burn where can be draw water',
Said Pearse to Connolly,
'When all the wells are parched away?
O plain as plain can be
There's nothing but our own red blood
Can make a right Rose Tree.'²

But there were also in them the doubts and reservations which most Irishmen had felt about the Proclamation of 1916: the doubts and reservations of those for whom Home Rule and the Act of 1920 represented an acceptable settlement:

2. Ibid., p. 396.
Was it needless death after all?
For England may keep faith
For all that is done and said,
We know their dream; enough
To know they dreamed and are dead: 1

In the event the Anglo-Irish Treaty brought to Ireland the realities of the Act of 1920 with some of the trappings of 1916. This Treaty set up, not the Republic proclaimed in 1916, but a Free State within the Empire and without the six countries of the north-east. Many—probably more than half—of those who had been fighting the Black and Tans while Yeats had been publishing his 1916 poems, felt that this was a betrayal, as Yeats' "Connolly and Pearse" 2 might have felt:

Maybe a breath of politic words
Has withered our Rose Tree; 3

Yeats now adopts an attitude of political alienation which becomes explicit in the poem Church and State:

Here is fresh matter, poet,
Matter for old age meet;
Might of the Church and the State,
Their mobs put under their feet.
O but heart's wine shall run pure,
Mind's bread grow sweet.

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.394.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p.396.
That were a cowardly song,
Wander in dreams no more;
What if the Church and the State
Are the mob that howls at the door!
Wine shall run thick to the end,
Bread taste sour.1

It is customary to say that, at this point, Yeats had become disillusioned with Fascism. One may accept judgement, but must also remark that the principal illusion which had been dissipated was the illusion that Fascism in Ireland stood a good chance of winning. In the spring and summer of 1933, the Fascism of the Irish Blueshirts looked to many people like a possible winner and in this phase Yeats was with the Blueshirts. By the autumn and winter of 1933-34, the Government's energetic measures - described by Yeats as panic measures - made it clear that de Valera was no von Papen O'Duffy, failing to devise anything effective in reply, revealed that he was no Hitler. The blue began to fade, and Yeats' interest in it faded proportionately.

In the political writings of his last two years the two elements in his politics - the Irish and the Protestant elements - entered into a new set of relations. The Irish element became more vocal than it had been since 1916 and the Protestant element was obliged to break finally with the

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.553.
traditional right wing in Irish politics. Anti-English feeling, long dormant in Yeats, became increasingly pronounced in the period 1937-38. A series of poems, Roger Casement, The Ghost of Roger Casement, The O'Rahilly, Come Gather Round Me, Parnellites, expressed, and did much to rekindle the old pride in Irish nationalism which the cynicism that followed the Civil War had dulled. The Casement poems especially had a powerful anti-English charge:

O what has made that sudden noise?  
What on the threshold stands?  
It never crossed the sea because  
John Bull and the sea are friends;  
But this is not the old sea  
Nor this the old seashore.  
What gave that roar of mockery,  
That roar in the sea's roar?  
The ghost of Roger Casement  
Is beating on the door.  

On the Boiler, written in the following year, is his last political statement: a sort of political testament. "'For the first time', he wrote to Maud Gonne about this tract, in what may be his last letter to her, "'I am saying what I believe about Irish and European politics'."² On the Boiler assumes – without, however, being altogether explicit about it – that the Fascist powers are winning and England

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.583.  
2. The Letters of W.B. Yeats, p.910.
"The Fascist countries", he writes in the section Tomorrow's Revolution, "know that civilization has reached a crisis and found there eloquence upon that knowledge".\(^1\) The only fault he has to find with them is that perhaps "from dread of attack"\(^2\) they encourage large families. He assumes in Ireland after the Revolution that "Some tragic crisis shall so alter Europe and all opinion that the Irish Government will teach the great majority of its school-children nothing but ploughing, harrowing, sowing, currycombing, bicycle-cleaning, drill-driving, parcel-making, bale-pushing, tin-can-soldering, door-knob-polishing, threshold-whitening, coat-cleaning, trouser-patching, and playing upon the squiffer, all things that serve human dignity, unless indeed it is decided that these things are better taught at home, in which case it can leave the poor children at peace".\(^3\)

At the time when this was written tragic crisis many expected was that which was to lead Pétain's France to adopt somewhat similar educational policies. It is hard to resist the conclusion that Yeats, when writing this, expected and hoped, that Ireland after the Revolution would be a sort of satellite of Fascist-dominated Europe. "'The danger', he

\(^2\) Ibid.
\(^3\) Ibid., p.438.
wrote in this year 1938, "is that there will be no war, that the skilled will attempt nothing, that the European civilization, like those older civilizations that saw the triumph of their gangrel stocks, will accept decay."

The war, he said, he wanted was a war between the skilled and the unskilled: as type of the skilled he took the crack German submarine commanders of the First World War, and nationally unspecified mechanized warriors of the future. As regards England his contempt, in this year of Munich, is unqualified and savage. After saying some hard things about King George V, he concludes Ireland After the Revolution with the words: "The Irish mind has still, in country rapscallion or in Bernard Shaw, an ancient cold, explosive, detonating impartiality. The England mind, excited by its newspaper proprietors and its schoolmasters, has turned into a bed-hot harlot."

Yeats' vision of the millennial, of bimillennial drifts of things takes, in fact, now one and now another colouring as he moves through the later years of his own life. The years of The Tower gather up their bitterness in some measure from the decline of Europe through war to war, in larger measure from the public face of Ireland, and in a measure

2. Ibid., p. 443.
larger still from the sense of some sombre climactic in his own late maturity. It is from the power with which all this is bound together, and from the continued pertinacious seeking for a role or attitude intellectually adequate and aesthetically satisfying in face of it, that The Tower derives its peculiar quality.

Here is the theme which he explores, to a strange effect of fusing mystery and brilliant lucidity, in Sailing to Byzantium, the first and key poem in The Tower:

*That is no country for old men.*

The impetus given to the poem by its opening word is alone a stroke of genius. The poet is already at sea, with "Whatever is begotten, born, and dies" [2] behind him. The second stanza poses the problem; the soul must sing louder:

*Nor is there singing school but studying Monuments of its own magnificence;* [3]

At least it is a new singing school that must be found, and its masters will be those "sages standing in God's holy fire" [4]. And these masters will lead him to salvation. This gives the transition to the proud and lovely last stanza.

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2. *Ibid*.
3. *Ibid*.
The artist will himself pass into the condition of a work of art; a miraculous automation exempt from time yet celebrating its endless effluxion — singing, without surcease and without pain:

To lords and ladies of Byzantium
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.¹

Golden nightingales may, in fact, have chirruped in the courts of Byzantine emperors, and in actuality they belong to the trivial world of Faberge. But Yeats had been sufficiently the pupil of Mallarme to be fascinated by the notion of Daedalian ingenuity directed to the artistic ends, and there are poems in The Tower — notably — The Two Songs from a Play, The Resurrection — which constitute small explicationary paradises. When we read that

The Roman Empire stood appalled:
It dropped the reins of peace and war²

Sailing to Byzantium is followed by a sequence of three poems called collectively The Tower. Here is the actual tower of Ballylee in its setting of ruined cottage and blackened tree, with its actual owner shorn of all "hammered gold and gold enamelling"³ and imaged no longer

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¹ The Poems of W.B. Yeats; p.403.
² Ibid., p.437.
³ Ibid., p.408.
as sightings but dog—

1. The Poems of W. B. Yeats, p. 409.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 415.
4. Ibid., p. 428.
But the very buses of civilization have proved no more
"Protected from the circle of the moon!"1 than have its
merest if most miraculous toys:

............Phidias' famous ivories2

Other toys - chargers and trumpeters, power and cannon and
shot - have proved no toys at all because as he believes that
"the nightmare/Rides upon sleep"3.

Yeats is only too well equipped with cosmic structures
in which his sombre temperament at this time can expatiate
at will. His danger is luxuriance in metaphysical distress-
es and a facile fatalism loftily expressed. It is present
in this poem:

We, who seven years ago
Talked of honour and of truth,
Shriek with pleasure if we show.
The weasel's twist, the weasel's tooth.4

The Curse of Cromwell is a satire against the contemp-
orary society which has sold away its soul just for a few
coins of silver. The last gleeman is wandering in an atmos-
sphere of terror and savagery wrought by the henchmen of
Cromwell, the dictator:

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.428.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p.429.
4. Ibid., p.431.
All neighbourly content and easy talk are gone,
But there’s no good complaining, for money’s rant is on.
He that’s mounting up must on his neighbour mount,
And we and all the Muses are things of no account.
They have schooling of their won, but I pass their schooling by,
What can they know that we know that know the time to die?¹

The old cordiality between the neighbours, the easy social intercourse, have yielded place to the fretful fever of profit and gain, when a man is eager to get on by crushing his neighbour. A new code has come into being in which poetry and song can find no place. But the heart of the poet is excited all the while "that things both can and cannot be"² and "the swordsmen and the ladies"³ who once patronized the poets and singers" can still keep company"⁴; can "pay the poet for a verse"⁵.

The poem, The Wild Old Wicked Man and the political ballads and epigrams present a world gone mad and the mask of the poet proper in such a world is that of the wicked old man who would either blast the world or return to the primitive life of the unaccommodated man:

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 581.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
That some stream of lightning
From the old man in the skies
Can burn out that suffering
No right - taught man denies.
But a coarse old man am I,
I choose the second-best,
I forget it all awhile
Upon a woman's breast.  
Daybreak and a candle-end.  

Among the political ballads quite a few are noteworthy for their satirical sting. A Model for the Laureate, for example, traces the history of the ruler on the throne through the stages of progressive degradation. In olden days thrones from China to Peru were occupied by rulers whom 
"men and women of all sorts/Proclaimed both good and great" and the poets were naturally prompted to sing their praises.

Then came "beggar-kings" and kings "Of rascals black and white" who believed that "a strong right arm/
Puts all men in a fright". The last of the race are the modern rulers who are surrounded by a host of public men and self-seekers who "Applaud a modern throne" for monetary gain. They are the rulers of files, seals and signatures.

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 539.
2. Ibid., p. 597.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
who are "office fools"\textsuperscript{1} and do not run the administration but are run by it. For such paper kings no decent poet can waste his words.

The Old Stone Cross is put in the mouth of "the man in the golden breastplate"\textsuperscript{2}, the ghost of the heroic past. It is another satire on modern democracy which is run by the united power of the statesman and journalist. The statesman is "an easy man"\textsuperscript{3} and "tells his lies by rote"\textsuperscript{4}. The journalist "makes up his lies"\textsuperscript{5} and takes man "by the throat"\textsuperscript{6}. So, says the voice:

Stay at home and drink your beer
And let the neighbours vote,\textsuperscript{7}

The age is dominated by people in whose life "Folly"\textsuperscript{8} is linked with "Elegance"\textsuperscript{9} and it has become difficult to "know a happy man/From any passing wretch"\textsuperscript{10}. It is:

Because this age and the next age
Engender in the ditch,\textsuperscript{11}

\begin{enumerate}
\item The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 598.
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid.
\end{enumerate}
The greatest irony of life is that:

No man knows which is which.

But the greater fall is registered by the tragic actors on the modern naturalistic stage:

But actors lacking music
Do most excite my spleen,
They say it is more human
To shuffle, grunt and groan,
Not knowing what unearthly stuff
Rounds a mighty scene. ²

They are quite incompetent to fathom the spiritual depth hidden in the tragic scene, which poetry alone can explore and vivify.

Politique, a small and beautiful lyric, is a reply to the statement of Thomas Mann, quoted at its head, that "In our time the destiny of man presents its meaning in political terms." ³ The poem presents two contrasted sources of truth: a set of international politicians, on the one hand, and on the other, a young girl attractive to the poet. The drift of the poet's argument point to the conclusion that the information provided by the learned and widely-travelled politicians may be based on truth, but it cannot equal the reality and truth which the poet can experience in his union.

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.598.
2. ibid., p.599.
3. Ibid., p.631.
with the girl on whom his heart is set:

How can I, that girl standing there,
My attention fix
On Roman or on Russian
Or on Spanish politics?
Yet here's a travelled man that knows
what he talks about,
And there's a politician
That has read and thought,
And maybe what they say is true
Of war and war's alarms,
But O that I were young again
And held her in my arms! 1

The poem distinguishes two types of truth, abstract truth
and truth realized in the heart. Politics may change govern-
ment and alter the social structure and make or mar the
destiny of a nation, but the social structure to be stable
will ultimately rest upon the truth of the heart. These
lines further recall the fusion in The Green Helmet of
aristocratic and heroic ideals:

How should the world be luckier if this house,
where passion and precision have been one
Time out of mind, became too ruinous
To breed the lidless eye that loves the sun? 2

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.631.
   It recalls to mind Eliot's Wasteland.
   My friend, blood shaking my heart.
The awful daring of a moment's surrender
which an age of prudence can never retract
by this, and this only, we have existed.
(Eliot, T.S., The Complete Poems and Plays, London,
Faber and Faber, 1975), p.74 .

2. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.264.
The jibing refrain celebrates the triumph of the Philistine and the death of ideals:

Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,
It's with O'Leary in the grave.\(^1\)

Against the shopkeeping morality of man the wasteful virtues are once again emphasized:

For this that all that blood was shed,
For this Edward Fitzgerald died,
And Robert Emmet and Wolfe Tone,
All that delirium of the brave?\(^2\)

The clinical word "'delirium'", placed arrestingingly in the torrent of rhetoric, suggests not only how heroic action appears to the Paudcens, but also its real nature, fantastic, extravagant and altogether reckless, as it is in Yeats' ideal of the tragic theatre. The wild goose remind one of Cuchulain's identification of himself in The Green Helmet with the great "'barnacle-goose'" in the last poem: "'A barnacle goose/Far up in the stretches of night'".\(^3\) There are the ideals buried with O'Leary; action capable of reaching into reality has been replaced by a "'shivering'"\(^4\) prudence.

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1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 289.
2. Ibid., p. 290.
3. Ibid., p. 622.
4. Ibid., p. 237.
The next two poems assert the artist's pride and solitariness against the Paudeens. When his work comes to nothing he should "Be secret and exult"\(^1\) like a "laughing string"\(^2\) played "Amid a place of stone"\(^3\). On a lonely height, amid stones and thorn trees, where everything stands in the eye of God, he hears the cry of the curlew and realises that no soul lacks "a sweet crystalline cry"\(^4\).

The two trees and To Some I have Talked with by the Fire, voice his lament that Maud Gonne gives herself so fanatically to Irish politics where people "with the clashing of their sword-blades make/A rapturous music, till the morning break/And the white hush end all but the loud beat/Of their long wings, the flash of their white feet"\(^5\) - and he would have her withdraw with him to serve Ireland only in the things of the spirit, in the resuscitation in the people's hearts of the heroic legends of the past.

His own pessimistic vision of democratic reality is revealed in The Fisherman:

\(^1\) The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.291.
\(^2\) Ibid.
\(^3\) Ibid.
\(^4\) Ibid.
\(^5\) Ibid., p.137.
All day I'd looked in the face
What I had hoped 'twould be
To write for my own race
And the reality;
The living men that I hate,
The dead man that I loved,
The craven man in his seat,
The insolent unreprieved,
And no knave brought to book
Who has won a drunken cheer,
The witty man and his joke
Aimed at the commonest ear,
The clever man who cries
The catch-cries of the clown.1

As late as 1920, the same conception recurs in a Meditation in Time of War, where the poet repudiates life
as fantasy:

For one throb of the artery,
While on that old grey stone I sat
Under the old wind-broken tree,
I knew that One is animate,
Mankind inanimate phantasy.2

The nostalgia for a dreamworld which is all knowledge and
no action reaches its culmination in The Shadowy Waters, a
dramatic poem:

All would be well
Could we but give us wholly to the dreams,
And get into their world that to the sense
Is shadow, and not linger wretchedly
Among substantial things; for it is dreams
That lift us to the flowing, changing world
That the hearts longs for.3

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 347.
2. Ibid., p. 406.
3. Ibid., p. 230.
Yeats believes that we ourselves are nothing but a mirror and that deliverance consists in turning the mirror away:

................. Fellow-wanderer,
Could we but mix ourselves into a dream,
Not in its image on the mirror!

Yeats conflicted attitude toward a nation he wanted both to serve and reject left him constantly fascinated with his public. Neither accepting them nor rejecting them, Yeats usually found ways to engage his audiences even as he complained that

............. There's something ails our colt
That must, as if it had not holly blood
Nor on Olympus leaped from cloud to cloud,
Shiver under the lash, strain, sweat and jolt
As though it dragged road-metal. My curse on plays
That have to be set up in fifty ways,
On the day's war with every knave and dolt,
Theatre business, management of men.
I swear before the dawn comes round again
I'll find the stable and pull out the bolt.

Yeats identifies himself with Pegasus, the horse of the gods, in this poem and likens his theatre work to the drudgery which that most noble and powerful horses would have to perform in a world ruled by the gods of economic utility.

3. Ibid., p. 260.
By 1911, however, Yeats as Pegasus had turned into Proteus, the dangerously metamorphic god Yeats uses to personify his audiences in *At the Abbey Theatre*:

Is there a bridle for this Proteus
That turns and changes like his draughty seas?  

Yeats also identified himself, perhaps unconsciously, with the very audiences about whom he complains:

when we are high and airy hundreds say
That if we hold that flight they'll leave the place,
while those same hundreds mock another day
because we have made our art of common things,
So bitterly, you'd dream they longed to look
All their lives through into some drifts of wings.

Yeats is describing his audiences in these lines, but as Pegasus/Proteus he often mocked himself in the same ways he mocks his audiences here.

The political or Burkean, significance of the image began to take over and to crowd other meanings out around the time of the Civil War. The most magnificent instance occurs in *Blood and the Moon*, in which an authoritarian tree-of-state confronts "mathematical" democracy:

And haughtier-headed Burke that proved the State a tree,
That this unconquerable labyrinth of the birds,
Cast but dead leaves to mathematical equality.  

Then again in *Three Songs to the Same Tune*:

Great nations blossom above;  
A slave bows down to a slave.  

And once more, in the same series —

Soldiers take pride in saluting their Captain,
where are the captains that govern mankind?  
What happens a tree that has nothing within it?
O marching wind, O a blast of the wind,  

Here was the idea his son developed after his disillusionment with nationalist politics, the belief stated in his poems praising the virtues of aristocratic life, *At Galway Races* and *To a Wealthy Man who promised a Second Subscription to the Dublin Municipal Gallery if it were proved the People wanted Pictures* and brought to its final assertion in *The Municipal Gallery Revisited* where he sees the work of John Synge, Augusta Gregory and himself as coming from contact with the soil:

we three alone in modern times had brought
Everything down to that sole test again,
Dream of the noble and the beggar-man.  

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The Rose of the World helps to prevent the image of Helen of Troy from operating as a vague literary reference, concentrating into a symbol of doomed heroic passion which stands in sharp contrast to the cloudy glamour of his other early poems. His long continued hopeless love for Maud Gonne also helped to concentrate his conception of the heroic relationship between beauty, dignity and destruction:

That is not natural in an age like this, Being high and solitary and most stern? Why, what could she have done, being what she is? Was there another Troy for her to burn? ¹

These lines come somewhat later. We can see in the earlier poems more clearly the struggle between the vaguely lament and the stylized heroic. In The Rose of Battle, we find:

Rose of all Roses, Rose of all the world! You, too, have come where the dim tides are hurled Upon the wharves of sorrow, and heard ring The bell that calls us on, the sweet far thing. ²

This is the early dream style and adjectives lie "sweet" and "dim" and phrases such as "the wharves of sorrow" proclaim very plainly to what literary world this poem belongs. Sometimes Yeats went over these early poems to change the romantic melancholy into heroic mourning, and the alternation is instructive.

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 257.
2. Ibid., p. 115.
The association of Homeric with Irish themes seems to have done Yeats nothing but good. The Helen-Deirdre identification provided him with many effective poetic attitudes, and sometimes we find even in his more plangent and melancholy lines something that reminds us of Homer in that mood of his that especially pleased Matthew Arnold — what one might call the more Virgilian Homer. It may be mere personal fancy to see in these lines from *The Secret Rose*:

> Who met Fand walking among flaming dew  
> By a grey shore where the wind never blew,

It is certainly true that Yeats in the 1890s was seeking and finding ways of associating the elegiac and the heroic so as simultaneously to discipline the former and humanize the latter.

The attempts are not of course always successful. Even the revised version of *He remembers Forgotten Beauty* (originally written in 1896) moves from sighing and kissing and "white Beauty" to the high and the lonely in a way that does not really unite them:

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And when you sigh from kiss to kiss
I hear white Beauty sighing, too,
For hours when all must fade like dew,
But flame on flame, and deep on deep,
Throne over throne where in half sleep,
Their swords upon their iron knees,
Brood her high lonely mysteries.¹

Irish politics stimulated Yeats' imagination to further
work on the relation between good art and the good life.
From the beginning he differed from most other members of the
Rhymers' Club in rejecting the escapist view of art:

And the sweet laughing eagle thoughts that grow
where wings have memory of wings, and all
That comes of the best knit to the best?²

The complicated arguments for and against the two
versions are well known; but the simplest and perhaps ade-
quate explanation (for the alternation does little but extend
and universalize and alignment between Maud Gonne and Troy)
is the sheer resonance that the names give and point to
political atrocities:

Troy passed away in one high funeral gleam,
And Usna's children died.³

In Leda and the Swan, the poet says:

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.156.
2. Ibid., p.264.
3. Ibid., p.111.
A shudder in the loins engenders there
The broken wall, the burning roof and tower
And Agamemnon dead. 1

In On a Picture of a Black Centaur by Edmund Dulac, Yeats says:

where seven Ephesian topers slept and never knew
when Alexander's empire passed, they slept so sound.
Stretch out your limbs and sleep a long Saturnian sleep;

The Byron reflects the idea:

Hector is dead, and there's a light in Troy;
We that look on but laugh in tragic joy. 3

The sureness of touch is apparent even in the minute. To
a Wealthy Man who promised a Second Subscription to the
Dublin Municipal Gallery if it were proved the People wanted
Pictures is a proud and aristocratic poem, where quick
nervous rhythms are integral with its tone of alienation.

And when they drove out Cosimo,
Indifferent how that rancour ran,
He gave the hours they had set free
To Michelozzo's latest plan
For the San Marco Library, 4

So the poem comes alive and prepares us for the align-
ments with Lutyens and the Municipal Gallery, which have
become part of a great processional movement. In the lines

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.441.
2. Ibid., p.442.
3. Ibid., p.564.
4. Ibid., p.288.
What cared Duke Ercole, that bid
His mummers to the market-place.¹

the keen edge of the rhythm would be blunted if we substituted Hercules for the Italian. But indeed the whole
attacking mood of the poem, the proud triumphant rhetoric
of hatred, is superb. We may think that the alignments be-
tween Coole and Urbino, between Michelozzo and Lutyens, are
slender enough: but the stride and energy of the poem
combine with similar assertions elsewhere to make these
alignments convincing. "It is in the arrangements of events
as in the words, and in that touch of extravagance, of irony,
of surprise which is set there after the desire of logic has
been satisfied and all that leaves one not in the circling
necessity, but caught up into the freedom of self-delight"².
All three terms — extravagance, irony, surprise — would be
familiar to a Renaissance rhetorician. But the integration
of rhythm with the idea of alienation is peculiarly a
Yeatsian gift.

But the popular poems about the Rising and its actors,
and the Casement poems, seem forced; the image that they
present appeals more strongly to an English than to an Anglo-
Irish audience. On the other hand The Curse of Cromwell

¹. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.287.
². Essays and Introductions, p.254.
lives by reason of its astounding energy, the rhythmical checks and substitutions, embodied in the violence of popular Balladry which he has transcended. We touch the rant in a favourite thought, that he had used before in The Countess Cathleen but which is now given a peculiar proud energy to express the theme of alienation:

And there is an old beggar wandering in his pride —
His fathers served their fathers before Christ was crucified.
O what of that, O what of that,
What is there left to say?¹

Yeats attacks political Fascism, not from a fully engaged interest in politics, but because he holds particular social eruption to be a symptom of forces which are against life; he is more interested in psychotherapy than in social machines; the former precedes and, in large measure, contains the answer to the latter.

In the following chapter attention is focused on the theme of religious alienation.

¹. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.580.