CHAPTER V

SELF-ALIENATION

For Yeats, alienation is ever-present in man in one form or another. It persists in every stage of antithesis and could only be overcome by a new synthesis. To put it more succinctly, alienation for Yeats, implies a loss of unity with the social substance, as well as a loss of independence; and the emergence of an awareness or feeling of the otherness of something. It further means to him a loss of universality whereby man alienates himself from his inner nature and reaches the extremity of discord with himself - the disparity between man's actual condition and essential nature and the objectification of spirit.

Yeats seeks to define alienation as it is manifest in the real life of man who finds himself sitting "Under broken stone" and "At the bottom of a pit". It is a place where "broad noon has never lit,/And shout a secret to the stone". He has "lost the theme" and for whom:

Its joy or night seem but a dream.

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1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.632.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p.633.
5. Ibid.
In *The Wanderings of Oisin*, Yeats compares a de-spiritualized natural world with the world of people living in seclusion:

............... You stars,
Across your wandering ruby cars
Shake the loose reins: you slaves of God
He rules you with an iron rod,
He holds you with an iron bond,
Each one woven to the other,
Each one woven to his brother
Like bubbles in a frozen pond;
But we in a lonely land abide
Unchainable as the dim tide,
With hearts that know nor law nor rule,
And hands that hold no wearsome tool.

In this poem the legendary Irish hero who has lived three hundred years with Niamh, his bride, in the land of immortals returns only by a mishap to find his years fall suddenly on him and himself condemned to drag out the rest of his existence in a Christianized Ireland which has no place for the ancient heroes:

Much wondering to see upon all hands, of wattles and
woodwork made,
Your bell-mounted churches, and guardless the sacred
cairn and the rath,
And a small and a feeble populace stooping with mattock
and spade,

Or weeding or ploughing with faces a-shining with much-toil wet; 
While in this place and that place, with bodies unglorious, their chieftains stood, 
Awaiting in patience the straw-death, croziered one, 
caught in your net:
Went the laughter of scorn from my mouth like the roaring of wind in a wood.¹

The Shadowy Waters has a similar theme in that it represents the voyage of life-rejecting poet and lover. Forgael moves over the "waste seas"² in search of an ideal happiness in that "country at the end of the world/where no child's born but to outlive the moon"³. After The Shadowy Waters his verse began to show a more personal bitterness than that contained in the musical melancholy of the early poems. The rather fluent world-weariness gives place to a more acrid dissatisfaction with life. The poem Responsibilities reveals a movement towards realism and away from a lofty, other-world romanticism. The bitterness of disillusionment and waste of life runs through the prefatory verses, in which the poet, addressing his ancestors, requests:

Pardon that for a barren passion's sake,  
Although I have come close on forty-nine,  
I have no child, I have nothing but a book,  
Nothing but that to prove your blood and mine.⁴

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1. The Poems of M.B. Yeats, p. 58.  
2. Ibid., p. 221.  
3. Ibid., p. 247.  
4. Ibid., p. 270.
It is notable that in these volume begins utterance occasioned by public events. And here too is the poem in which the poet speaks of the lying days of his youth when he swayed his leaves and flowers in the sun and now prays that he may "wither into the truth".1

His attitude to life of hard, scornful acceptance out of which the poems in The Tower and The Winding Stair drew their origin explains his religious predilections. Freed from all uncertainties he could go on to that celebration of blind, passionate, aimless life out of which some of his most magnificent verse arose. Free from all religious hypocracies he wishes to live this worldly life:

I am content to live it all again.2

and:

A blind man battering blind men;
Or into that most fecund ditch of all,
The folly that man does
Or must suffer, if he woos
A proud woman not kindred of his soul,

I am content to follow to its source
Every event in action or in thought;
Measure the lot; forgive myself the lot!
When such as I cast out remorse
So great a sweetness flows into the breast
We must laugh and we must sing,
We are blest by everything,
Everything we look upon is blest.3

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2. Ibid., p. 479.
3. Ibid.
In *The Wanderings of Oisin*, *Crossways*, *The Rose* and *The Wind among the Reeds*, Yeats located the Spirit in a realm of picturesque sorrow with numberless islands, many a Danaan Shore, and a "woven world - forgotten isle". In these books whatever mode of existence is for the time being identified with the Spirit is protected, in tenderness, from the onslaught of Body or Nature. Those early poems are a long and intermittently beautiful yes - saying to the Spirit; but the Spirit is abused, maimed, because it is torn from the Body. In later years and with different materials Yeats frequently responded to the spirit; under the guise of Mind, for instance, as in *All Souls' Night*:

Such thought - such thought have I that hold it tight Till meditation master all its parts, Nothing can stay my glance Until that glance run in the world's despite To where the damned have howled away their hearts, And where the blessed dance; Such thought, that in it bound I need no other thing, Wound in mind's wandering As mummies in the mummy-cloth are wound.  

In this poem Yeats praises those adepts who, like Florence Emery, meditate upon unknown thought and repudiate the Body:

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................what matter who it be,
So that his elements have grown so fine
The fume of muscatel
Can give his sharpened palate ecstasy
No living man can drink from the whole wine.  

Ours, in fact, are gross palates.

A stick of incense is a version of Yeats' belief that we must hold to what we have so that the next civilization may be born, not from a virgin's womb, nor a tomb without body, but of own rich experience. Saint Joseph is burning the incense in the shrine and reflecting over the fury and turmoil of the Christian Civilization; he wonders if all this fury and murderousness arose from a basic limitation in the religion itself, because in it the body was totally denied, inasmuch as Christ was born of a Virgin, not out of the union of bodies, and his death was followed by the resurrection in which his grave became empty. The result is humanity is melting away. But he likes the sweet smell of incense issuing from his hand. It is at least one solid, physical and sensuous appeal of an otherwise abstract religion unlike those prevalent in modern world.

Whence did all that fury come?
From empty tomb or Virgin womb?
Saint Joseph thought the world would melt
But liked the way his finger smelt.

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 473.
2. Ibid., p. 619.
Veronica's Napkin presents two poles of religion, symbolized by the Old Testament and the New Testament, respectively. The God of the Old Testament, Jehovah with his "angelic hierarchy"¹, was enthroned in the "Heavenly Circuit"² for the hair of the loyal queen, Berenice, dedicated to Venus for the safety of her husband became translated into a cluster of stars. This God was remote from man, in his eternal kingdom, which is larger than the largest and the smaller than the smallest atom "a needle's eye"³.

The second pole is represented by the cross, when God came in the human form as a creature of flesh and blood, so that when his wounded face was wiped by the napkin of Saint Veronica, as the story goes, there appeared a "pattern on a napkin dipped in blood"⁴. This is a religion which can be felt in our heart and blood, based as it is, upon the propinquity of God and Man and not on the self-seeking attitude of man.

In the earlier poem, The Gyres, the poet was able to hear the voice, issuing from the cavern, which was one word, "Rejoice"⁵. But now he wants to make sure if his soul would rejoice in that night of its final sleep. He is not

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¹ The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.483.
² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid., p.564.
so confident now as he confronts the Rocky Voice. But the meditation is abruptly distracted by the sound of some bird, hawk or owl, dropping down dead and the cry of a stricken rabbit. The reality of pain and death has overpowered his dream of the state after death. The old man is preoccupied with the reality of death. The anxiety to get the judgment of some superior wisdom on his work and achievement had already inspired his poem, *Are You Content?* which is addressed to his dead ancestors, whose eyes, 'spiritualised by death', can be the best judge of his real worth. They alone can tell him if he has proved himself true to the blood which runs in his veins:

I call on those that call me son,  
Grandson, or great-grandson,  
On uncles, aunts, great-uncles or great-aunts,  
To judge what I have done.  
Have I, that put it into words,  
Spoilt what old loins have sent?  
Eyes spiritualised by death can judge,  
I cannot, but I am not content.  

The theme of the cycles of civilization is taken up in the *Two Songs from a Play*. The songs are taken from Yeats' play *The Resurrection* and incorporate the materials present in the poet's earlier story, *The Adoration of the Magi*, as also the information gathered from Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. The first song deals with the death and

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1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 604.
resurrection of Dionysus, while the second with the birth, 
crucifixion and death of Christ, both the events being 
symbols of a new civilization.

Moreover, the prophecy about the golden age of Astraea 
made in Virgil's Fourth Eclogue, was interpreted by the 
Christian church as a counterpart of the golden age associat-
ed with Mary and her Babe.

The first song begins with the description of Dionysus, 
born out of the union of Zeus and Persephone, who was later 
on torn to pieces by the Titanus, under the instigation of 
Hera, queen of Zeus. But the dismembered body of Dionysus 
is watched by Athena, daughter of Zeus, a Virgin goddess, 
who could read the future glory to arise out of this death. 
She tore out the palpitating heart and took it away. This 
was a symbol of resurrection, the birth of a new civilization, 
which was celebrated by the Muses in their joyful song as 
a crucial point of a new life in the cycles of the Great 
Year. The new civilization as prophesied by Virgil is 
pictured in the first four lines of the second stanza:

Another Troy must rise and set, 
Another lineage feed the crow, 
Another Argo's painted prow 
Drive to a flashier bauble yet.1

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 437.
Religion, according to Yeats, must bring about the assimilation and synthesis of ideas. Ideas serve the function only of means - the end being the analysis of crisis of a time or man's situation in general, and restoration of order. A secular humanism changes into a religious one but his religion rests secure on the fundamental humanitarian ideals and values. Yeats' social, psychological and religious ideas are related to a unified sensibility, like different points on the circumference of a circle drawn equally to one centre - the grand humanitarian purpose - to which he devotes his muse and ideas. His prayer, both for the lost and the good souls, reveals his basic humanitarian stand which is essentially religious.

In the following chapter the theme of self-alienation has been dwelt upon.
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Yeats seeks to define alienation as it is manifest in the real life of man who finds himself sitting "Under broken stone"¹ and "At the bottom of a pit"². It is a place where "broad noon has never lit,/And shout a secret to the stone"³. He has "lost the theme"⁴ and for whom:

Its joy or night seem but a dream⁵.

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¹ The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 632.
² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid., p. 633.
⁵ Ibid.
He finds that:

Up there some hawk or owl has struck,
Dropping out of sky or rock,
A stricken rabbit is crying out,
And its cry distracts my thought.\(^1\)

He confined his use of the notion of alienation to the critique of religion. He also observed that man has no master but himself and that the "spiritual intellect's great work"\(^2\) is shirk "in vain"\(^3\) because "There is no release/
In a bodkin or disease"\(^4\).

The Collar-Bone of a Hare is a wishful escapism into the world of the fairies where life is ever young and panting, a perpetual round of song and dance. From that vantage point he can watch, as through a magic telescope, through a hole in "The collar-bone of a hare/Worn thin by the lapping of water"\(^5\), the petty routine of convention - ridden human world and laugh "At all who marry in churches"\(^6\).

This mood is counterpointed by the philosophy of the carefree rogue, Billy Byrne. He decides to sleep over grandfather Rosicross' battered tomb where he dreams about the

\(1\) The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 633.
\(2\) Ibid., p. 632.
\(3\) Ibid.
\(4\) Ibid., p. 633.
\(5\) Ibid., p. 330.
\(6\) Ibid.
"golden king and silver lady"¹ (sun and moon) singing, shouting and whirling about on their tireless toes in a spiralling movement towards the top of the mountain. But the happy dream sends him back to life with a renewed determination:

I cannot find the peace of home
On great-grandfather's battered tomb.²

Like many Anglo-Irish writers Yeats has an instinct for finding himself an object of amusement. In part this springs from what he regards as an Irish characteristic "a perfectly disinterested, an absolutely unselfish love of making mischief, mischief for its own dear sake"³; in part it was based upon a dislike of self-importance:

Aristocracies and pessimists all malign, and the whole of Nietzsche is malign; so are college dons and their retinue, but so were not Shakespeare and Shelley. Wordsworth was malign, so was Byron and is Swinburne. These people could not get away from their self-importance.⁴

"The poet is always solitary"⁵ finding his solace and salvation in moments of dispassionate detachment from the hum drum and vulgarity of life. Again he comments:

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 331.
2. Ibid., p. 332.
4. Ibid., p. 54.
5. Yeats, J. J.; Early Memories; p. 23.
The individual man of entire sincerity has to wrestle with himself, unless transported by rage or passion; he has no mind to make up, with none to help him and no guide except his conscience; and conscience after all, is but a feeble glimmer in labyrinthine cavern of darkness.¹

These are the ideas we find W.B. Yeats carrying on in the poem My House. He describes how "Two men have founded"² in the "ancient tower"³ the original "man-at-arms"⁴ and his "score of horse"⁵:

> And I, that after me
> My bodily heirs may find,
> To exalt a lonely mind,
> Befitting emblems of adversity.⁶

In Vacillation, the tree of the heart embodies the heart's complexity, the organic interdependence of both life-giving and destructive elements:

> A tree there is that from its topmost bough
> Is half all glittering flame and half all green
> Abounding foliage moistened with the dew;
> And half a half and yet is all the scene;
> And half and half consume what they renew.⁷

On 10 June 1918 John Butler Yeats wrote to his son quite simply: "The way to be happy is to forget yourself. That is why Robert Gregory was happy......"⁸. He

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1. Yeats, J.B., Early Memories, p.90.
2. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.420.
3. Ibid., p.419.
4. Ibid., p.420.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., p.620.
distinguished two ways of achieving self-forgetfulness, as in the war, or in a movement for reform, or in games; or again through art and beauty. He saw war as so overwhelmingly gregarious that while it lasts it suspends all the movements and the susceptibilities of the solitary man. The same idea runs through one of Yeats' poems on Robert Gregory, *An Irish Airman Foresees his Death* written in 1918:

I balanced all, brought all to mind,
The years to come seemed waste of breath,
A waste of breath the years behind
In balance with this life, this death.  

This belief in the necessity of solitude led him to believe also in the detachment needed by a poet. Emotionalism, he thinks is bad because it lacks seriousness. Nevertheless, the theme of the poem is worth some attention. The *Sad Shepherd* tries in vain to arouse the sympathy of nature, but the natural world is unconcerned with him and makes no response:

And then the man whom Sorrow named his friend
Cried out, Dim sea, hear my most piteous story!
The sea swept on and cried her old cry still,
Rolling along in dreams from hill to hill.
He fled the persecution of her glory
And, in a far-off, gentle valley stopping,
Cried all his story to the dewdrops glistening.  

The shepherd flees "from the persecution of her glory". Now "persecution" is an interesting and indeed arresting word in this context. Nature persecutes man by giving him the expectations of its sympathy - because of its beauty and its mood - creating role only in order to withhold it. Yeats, at least in his early phase, believes that nature's continual betrayal of man's expectations of it was part of the pattern of reality.

We have viewed Yeats earlier as one who would only be carried down the hill kicking. Here we meet an old man, a "Grandfather" ¹ who is brought to the gallows,

...........kicked before he died
He did it out of pride.²

In A Prayer for my Daughter, he pictures innocent babe in the cradle, beset with the "howling" storm outside, which is a prefiguration of the trials and troubles in the real world, awaiting the entry of the new creature into the arena of life:

Once more the storm is howling, and half hid
Under this cradle-hood and coverlid
My child sleeps on. There is no obstacle
But Gregory's wood and one bare hill
Whereby the haystack-and roof-levelling wind,
Bred on the Atlantic, can be stayed;
And for an hour I have walked and prayed
Because of the great gloom that is in my mind.³

¹ The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.544.
² Ibid., p.545.
³ Ibid., p.403.
The poet is in a gloomy mood partly through his grave concern at the turbulence in society and partly through anxiety for the future of the child in a world which is growing harsher and coarser every day. So the raging storm becomes the image of the future, envisioned as a crowd of delirious revelers moving to the loud beats of a drum like frenzied Maenads, issuing out of "the murderous innocence of the sea":

I have walked and prayed for this young child an hour
And heard the sea-wind scream upon the tower,
And under the arches of the bridge, and scream
In the elms above the flooded stream;
Imagining in excited reverie
That the future years had come,
Dancing to a frenzied drum,
Out of the murderous innocence of the sea.\(^1\)

The cruelty of the sea is innocent because it is natural and impersonal, unlike the deliberate and unnatural cruelty of man. As a shield for her protection the poet prays for certain gifts and virtues which the child must cultivate as she grows up to womanhood. In the third stanza he wishes her to have beauty, but beauty not so excessive as to intoxicate some stranger or fill her own heart with an inordinate self-conceit as she looks into her mirror and Narcissus-like falls in love with her image and idol; as it as a thing sufficient unto itself. For such a concern dries up the

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1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 403.
natural kindness of a woman and blunts that insight of the heart which is needed to select a true and congenial friend or partner:

May she be granted beauty and yet not
beauty to make a stranger's eye distraught,
or hers before a looking-glass, for such,
Being made beautiful overmuch,
Consider beauty a sufficient end,
Lose natural kindness and maybe
The heart-revealing intimacy
That chooses right and never find a friend.¹

In the next stanza the poet cites illustrations of the vain beauties who made wrong choices of life-mates. Helen, Homer’s paragon, selected a fool, Menelaus, for her husband and found her life unbearable; while Venus, goddess of love, who was born out the sea-form, without a male parent, therefore, was all heart without the control of the male intellect, in her wanton wildness, chose a clumsy-legged divine blacksmith, Hephaestus or Vulcan, and proved a flighty wife. It seems that beautiful women become vain, capricious and erratic and lose courtesy or aristocratic refinement, blended with judgment, which, for them, is the classical "Horn of Plenty", infinite riches in a small room:

¹. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.403.
Helen being chosen found life flat and dull
And later had much trouble from a fool,
While that great Queen, that rose out of the spray,
Being fatherless could have her way
Yet chose a bandy-legged smith for man.
It's certain that fine women eat
A crazy salad with their meat
Whereby the Horn of Plenty is undone.  

So the poet wishes her to cultivate courtesy as her principal virtue. Now courtesy is not a gift but an acquisition, product of sincere labour on the part of women who are not exceptionally beautiful. Then remembering his own infatuation for the beautiful Maud Gonne, the poet observes that many who dote on the beauty of a woman become ultimately 'wise', though sad at first, while many 'a poor man', deprived of the favour of a proud beauty who wanders and at last lights on a woman who returns his love finds in the natural kindness of a woman's heart a rich substitute for personal charm that takes the eye:

In courtesy I'd have her chiefly learned;
Hearts are not had as a gift but hearts are earned
By those that are not entirely beautiful;
Yet many, that have played the fool
For beauty's very self, has charm made wise.
And many a poor man that has roved,
Loved and thought himself beloved,
From a glad kindness cannot take his eyes.  

There is an interesting statement in Yeats' A Prayer for Old Age which is quite pertinent to the tone of many of

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.404.
2. Ibid.
the last poems.

God guard me from those thoughts men think
In the mind alone;
He that sings a lasting song
Thinks in a marrow-bone; 1

He continues:

I pray for fashion's word is out
And prayer comes round again -
That I may seem, though I die old,
A foolish, passionate man. 2

In The Circus Animals' Desertion, he says:

Players and painted stage took all my love,
And not those things that they were emblems of. 3

This remark is made in self-approach, but the fact
remains that without its engrossment in a physical world
Yeats' later poetry would lack its characteristic solidity.
Yeats declares in I See Phantoms of Hatred and of the Heart's
Fullness and of the Coming Emptiness:

.......... The abstract joy,
The half-read wisdom of daemonic images,
Suffice the ageing man as once the growing boy. 4

Moreover remarks such as the following gain in purpose-
fulness and weight if we see them as rooted in the personal

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 553.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 630.
4. Ibid., p. 427.
principle:

we lose our freedom more and more as we get away from ourselves—because we have turned the table of value upside down and believe that the root of reality is not in the centre but somewhere in that whirling circumference.\(^1\)

In *The Wanderings of Oisin*, none of the islands offers a permanent refuge. The staff of a warrior's lance, recalling battle, breaks the spell of the first island; a bell bough, suggesting sleep and forgetfulness, breaks that of second; and the sheer fact of being human dissolves the enchantment of the third:

As she murmured, 'O wandering Oisin, the strength of the bell-branch is naught,
For there moves alive in your fingers the fluttering sadness of earth.'\(^2\)

Oisin becomes an old man the moment he touches Irish soil. Time demands its price which cannot be evaded. When Oisin asks at the end of the second book which of the three islands is the Isle of Youth, Niamh's response is significant:

'None know', she said;
And on my bosom laid her weeping head.\(^3\)

Similarly he affirms his convictions that to live an arduous and full life and to impose a discipline on ourselves

\(^{2}\) The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 55.
instead of accepting one from others we must imagine ourselves as different from what we are and assume the second self. Man desires his opposite and fulfills himself in embodying his opposite and the conflict thus sought is the basis of creative development. *Ego Dominus Tuus* gives the doctrine its poetic expression:

I call to the mysterious one who yet
Shall walk the wet sands by the edge of the stream
And look most like me, being indeed my double,
And prove of all imaginable things
The most unlike, being my anti-self, 1

In the next section the moon comes to represent the reality that shines into and shapes action, while blood represents the dark, organic and propulsive power which clamours drunkenly for, distorts or simply ignores the reality which it cannot embody, but also cannot tarnish. The sense of an incorruptible radiance, involved in change yet inviolably apart from it, is strongly conveyed by a symbolism which gives due weight to the brute forces in change. The next section then moves the engaged symbols apart:

................No matter what I said,
For wisdom is the property of the dead,
A something incompatible with life; and power,
Like everything that has the stain of blood,
A property of the living; 2

It is a conclusion charged by the force of the poem, with "dead" suggesting both the past which the present has rejected and ruined and the world beyond life, the incorruptible moonlight. At the same time, the stain of blood is the mark of life. Power completes wisdom; but it can do so only by betraying it.

Parnell's Funeral is the second poem on Parnell, the great Irish politician and patriot, who died heart-broken as the result of malicious campaigns launched by his own compatriots for his suspected liaison with a married woman. Yeats seeks to glorify him as the norm of political sagacity needed to control the mobocracy the demagogy of the present age.

The first stanza refers to a strange phenomenon which occurred while the dead body of the great patriot was being lowered into his grave beside that of O'Connell whom Yeats calls "the Great Comedian" to stress the tragic role of Parnell. The circumstances were recorded by Yeats himself:

Under the Great Comedian's tomb the crowd,
A bundle of tempestuous cloud is blown
About the sky; where that is clear of cloud
Brightness remains; a brighter star shoots down;
What shudders run through all that animal blood?
What is this sacrifice? Can someone there
Recall the Cretan barb that pierced a star?¹

¹ The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 541.
In the second stanza the scene changes to the ancient ritual by the sacrifice of the boy by Mother-Goddess, which was witnessed by a crowd of the faithful. But one particular detail of this sacrifice namely, the Mother cutting out the heart of the sacrificed boy, recalls another fertility myth, the one connected with Dionysus, Son of Zeus, who was mutilated by the Titans, but his palpitating heart was torn out and preserved by Minerva, the daughter of Zeus, and the preserved heart led to the birth of a new phase of civilization. Yeats refers to this myth in the *Two Songs from a Play*:

Rich foliage that the starlight glittered through,
A frenzied crowd, and where the branches sprang
A beautiful seated boy; a sacred bow;
A woman, and an arrow on a string;
A pierced boy, image of a star laid low.
That woman, the Great Mother imaging,
Cut out his heart. Some master of design
Stamped boy and tree upon Sicilian coin.¹

In *Parnell's Funeral*, Yeats recalls Parnell and his age which was "the reversal of an age"². In the past great Irish poets like Emmet Fitzgerald Wolfe Tone, were murdered by "strangers"³ and the Irish people simply stood passive spectators:

We lived like men that watch a painted stage.
What matter for the scene, the scene once gone:
It had not touched our lives.⁴

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¹ The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 541.
² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid., p. 542.
But in the case of Parnell it was "popular rage"\(^1\), the "Hysterica passio"\(^2\) of the Irish people that "dragged this quarry down"\(^3\). None else was to blame:

None shared our guilt; nor did we play a part
Upon a painted stage when we devoured his heart.\(^4\)

Yeats feels that he himself has his own share in the general guilt for failing to celebrate the martyrdom of that heroic personality:

Come, fix upon me that accusing eye.
I thirst for accusation.\(^5\)

The poet, thus experiences a pinch of remorse hammering hard upon his soul.

The verse of Crossways the The Rose evinces, and even depends for something of its charms upon the paradox of considerable poetic energy devoted to achieving the most languorous-seeming evocations of a large vague melancholy:

Beauty grown sad with its eternity
Made you of us, and of the dim grey sea.\(^6\)

what is noteworthy here is that to eternal beauty he has given too monotonous a back ground of Druid twilight, Danaan

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1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 542.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., p. 115.
fruitage, dim tides and star-laden seas.

The greater part of The wind among the Reeds is given over to lyrics of frustrated love. It is, in fact, Maud Gonne’s book. Yeats tells us indeed that one or two of the poems are addressed to, or concern, Diana Vernon; and in The Lover mourns for the Loss of Love, the two women are brought together:

Pale brows, still hands and dim hair,
I had a beautiful friend
And dreamed that the old despair
Would end in Love in the end;
She looked in my heart one day
And saw your image was there;
She has gone weeping away.¹

Yet the conflict exists, and closes the poem The Unappeasable Host:

O heart the winds have shaken, the unappeasable host
Is comelier than candles at Mother Marry’s feet.²

It is recorded that Yeats once silenced an angry gathering of offended patriots and it was with no fanciful questioning that he wrote in The Man and the Echo in the last months of his life:

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.152.
2. Ibid., p.147.
All that I have said and done,
Now that I am old and ill,
Turns into a question till
I lie awake night after night
And never get the answers right.1

In *The Arrow*, he says:

I thought of your beauty, and this arrow,
Made out of a wild thought, is in my marrow.
There's no man may look upon her, no man,
As when newly grown to be a woman,
Tall and noble but with face and bosom
Delicate in colour as apple blossom.2

In *The Folly of Being Comforted*, the poet laments the callousness of Maud Gonne:

.......O she had not these ways
when all the wild summer was in her gaze.3

In *The Old Men Admiring Themselves in the Water*, the poet hears "'the old, old men say'"4 that "'Everything alters,/
And one by one we drop away'"5. He visualises them thus:

They had hands like claws, and their knees
were twisted like the old thorn-trees
By the waters.6

The poet further hears the old men saying:

2. Ibid., p. 199.
3. Ibid., p. 200.
4. Ibid., p. 208.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
All that's beautiful drifts away
Like the waters. ¹

These new effects stand side by side with others long familiar to us. In Under the Moon, the poet feels sick with the order of the world:

I have no happiness in dreaming of Brycolinde,
Nor Avalon the grass-green hollow, nor Joyous Isle,
Where one found Lancelot crazed and hid him for a while;
Nor Uladh, when Naoise had thrown a sail upon the wind;
Nor lands that seem too dim to be burdens on the heart: ²

The sentiment, indeed, here would seem to be forward-looking; but again at the close of the poem there is relapse:

To dream of women whose beauty was folded in dismay,
Even in an old story, is a burden not to be borne. ³

Yet, whether as too dim or too poignant, Uladh and Naoise are on their way out, and Tara, with its dream-women from the "dove-grey faery lands" ⁴, begins to fade behind:

Those topless towers
Where Helen walked with her boy, ⁵

Indeed, it is now Helen's image that the thought of Maud Gonne frequently evokes - this not, perhaps, with the highest

¹. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.208.
². Ibid., p.209.
⁴. Ibid., p.162.
⁵. Ibid., p.293.
appropriateness, but at least to august effect. What Yeats is chiefly searching for is august effect. Dublin - "this unmannerly town"¹ in which he has laboured at unrequitted tasks - is unfavourably compared with other localities. In The People, he says:

...............I might have lived,
And you know well how great the longing has been,
Where every day my footfall should have lit
In the green shadow of Ferrara wall;
Or climbed among the images of the past -
The unperturbed and courtly images -
Evening and morning, the steep street of Urbino
To where the Duchess and her people talked²

It is these particular "images of the past" that he brings shatteringly to bear in the matter of Lane's pictures. In To a Wealthy Man who promised a Second Subscription to the Dublin Municipal Gallery if it were proved the People wanted Pictures, he says:

You gave, but will not give again
Untill enough of Paudeen's pence
By Biddy's halfpennies have lain
To be 'some sort of evidence',
Before you'll put your guineas down,
That things it were a pride to give
Are what the blind and ignorant town
Imagines best to make it thrive.³

He continues:

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 351.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 287.
what th' onion-sellers thought or did
So that his Plautus set the pace
For the Italian comedies?
And Guidobaldo, when he made
That grammar school of courtesies
Where wit and beauty learned their trade
Upon Urbino's windy hill,
Had sent to runners to and fro
That he might learn the shepherds' will.\(^1\)

He concludes:

Your open hand but shows our loss,
For he knew better how to live.
Let Paudeens play at pitch and toss,
Look up in the sun's eye and give
what the exultant heart calls good
That some new day may breed the best
Because you gave, not what they would,
But the right twigs for an eagle's nest!\(^2\)

There is a sense in which this is inflated much beyond its occasion. We may hesitate, moreover, to respond to it from a consciousness of how close it brings us in feeling to Yeats, who was too haughty to seem to recognize in the street other than his most humble acquaintance. Yet it is magnificent.

It is in \textit{The wild Swans at Coole} that he paves the way for the enlarged and lustful old man who is to be among the most formidable impersonation of his actual later years. In \textit{Men Improve with the Years}, the poet feels disgusted and torn by his own fancy. But at the same time this sense of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{The Poems of W.B. Yeats}, p.287.
  \item \textit{Ibid.}, p.288.
\end{itemize}
alienation makes him ponder over the truth:

I am worn out with dreams;  
A weather-worn, marble triton  
Among the streams;  
And all day long I look  
Upon this lady's beauty  
As though I had found in a book  
A pictured beauty,  
Pleased to have filled the eyes  
On the discerning ears,  
Delighted to be but wise,  
For men improve with the years;  
And yet, and yet,  
Is this my dream, or the truth?  
O would that we had met  
When I had my burning youth!  
But I grow old among dreams,  
A weather-worn, marble triton  
Among the streams.  

Men Improve with the Years is the ironic title of this poem.  
Of kinderded inspiration is The Living Beauty which appears  
to have been printed upon approximately the first anniversary  
of his marriage:

I bade, because the wick and oil are spent  
And frozen are the channels of the blood,  
My discontented heart to draw content  
From beauty that is cast out of a mould  
In bronze, or that in dazzling marble appears,  

There is a group of poems on this theme, the most succinct  
being A Song with the refrain:

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1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.329.  
2. Ibid., p.333.
O who could have foretold
That the heart grows old?¹

and the entirely stark statement:

I have not lost desire
But the heart that I had;²

Along with this go, in quite a new manner, are direct evocations of sexual encounter. Solomon and Sheba are made to behave in a manner that Naoise and Deirdre would have considered highly indecorous. In The Dawn, he says:

Harshness of their desire
That made them stretch and yawn,
Pleasure that comes with sleep,
Shudder that made them one.³

The shudder is to recur in Leda and the Swan. And Leda herself "that sprightly girl trodden by a bird"⁴—here puts in a preliminary appearance in His Phoenix, an uncharacteristically gay and gallant love poem. Another prelusive strain is found in a group of poems dealing with beggars:  Billy Byrne, who proposes to "pick a pocket/And snug it in a feather bed"⁵—but not before indulging in a fancy for

¹. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 334.
². Ibid., p. 335.
³. Ibid., p. 345.
⁴. Ibid., p. 333.
⁵. Ibid., p. 332.
the "sun and moon",¹ as "golden king and that wild lady",² which has led some critics to credit him with much arcane philosophy; and others who exhibit the frenzy that later naked wretches are regularly to indulge, or who engage in violent dispute. The Magi and The Dolls - both in Responsibilities - are early examples of poems hinting some esoteric significance, and are designed to stand to one another in a relationship which Yeats does not illuminate very fully in a note appended to the second. At least The Magi are figures in a cyclical vision of history:

Appear and disappear in the blue depth of the sky
With all their ancient faces like rain-beaten stones,
And all their helms of silver hovering side by side,
And all their eyes still fixed, hoping to find once more,
Being by Calvary's turbulence unsatisfied,
The uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor.³

The Dolls, although undignified, have an advantage over the baby:

A doll in the doll-maker's house
Looks at the cradle and paws:
'That is an insult to us'.
But the oldest of all the dolls,
Who had seen, being kept for show,
Generations of his sort,
Out-screams the whole shelf: 'Although
There's not a man can report
Evil of this place,
The man and the woman bring
Nither, to our disgrace, ⁴
A noisy and filthy thing'.

¹. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.331.
². Ibid., p.332.
³. Ibid., p.318.
⁴. Ibid., p.319.
The Dolls are enlarged by the mystery of human birth.
The Magi are perpetually drawn to it and perpetually disillusioned.

Lines Written in Dejection was composed in 1915, and in it Yeats’ sense of himself as an ageing man is more darkly intimated:

when have I last looked on
The round green eyes and the long wavering bodies
Of the dark leopards of the moon?
All the wild witches, those most noble ladies,
For all their broom-sticks and their tears,
Their angry tears, are gone.
The holy centaurs of the hills are vanished;
I have nothing but the embittered sun;
Banned heroic mother moon and vanished,
And now that I have come to fifty years
I must endure the timid sun.¹

Yet the last of them, The Double Vision of Michael Robartes, although hated by Mr. Pound, is sufficiently difficult. Robartes’ first vision occurs during the first phase of the moon:

On the grey rock of Cashel the mind’s eye
Has called up the cold spirits that are born
When the old moon is vanished from the sky
And the new still hides her horn.²

This is the phase of complete objectivity, and also of complete passivity. There being no conflict of primary

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.343.
2. Ibid., p.332.
with antithetical in it, there can be no humanity: Human life cannot be completely objective.

At this stage Yeats holds that his mind has become indifferent to good and evil, to truth and falsehood; body has become undifferentiated. Mind and body take whatever shape, accept whatever image is imprinted upon them, transact whatever purpose is imposed upon them, and are indeed the instruments of supernatural manifestation. And so:

Under blank eyes and fingers never still
The particular is pounded till it is man.
when had I my own will?
O not since life began.

Constrained, arraigned, baffled, bent and unbent
By these wire-jointed jaws and limbs of wood,
Themselves obedient,
Knowing not evil and good;

Obedient to some hidden magical breath.
They do not even feel, so abstract are they,
So dead beyond our death,
Triumph that we obey.¹

The image is of a doll controlled by dolls, and it renders the full burden of the determinism inherent in the system. The second vision is seen

.........by the moon's light
Now at its fifteenth night.²

¹ The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 382.
² Ibid., p. 383.
The poet's life has been destroyed by a woman nurtured
"In beauty's murderous brood"¹ and with a "heart of
stone".² He has attempted many things since his disillu-
sionment. But "not a thing is done"³:

So like a bit of stone I lie
Under a broken tree.⁴

The Empty Cup we know to be associated with Diana Vernon:

I crazy man that found a cup,
When all but dead of thirst,
Hardly dared to wet his mouth
Imagining, moon-accursed,
That another mouthful
And his beating heart would burst.
October last I found it too
But found it dry as bone,
And for that reason am I crazed
And my sleep is gone.⁵

His Memories achieves its poignancy by making perhaps, more
free with biographical fact. Long ago "She who had brought
great Hector down"⁶ took her pleasure with the poet—and
now:

My arms are like the twisted thorn
And yet there beauty lay;⁷

¹ The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 451.
² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid., p. 452.
⁵ Ibid., p. 454.
⁶ Ibid., p. 455.
⁷ Ibid., p. 454.
He goes on to mention much activity with a cage of canaries, a noisy and cantankerous dinner at a restaurant last night, and some trouble caused at the Abbey theatre by a phantom dog; a brief chronicle of the satisfaction obtainable from life; miscellaneous traffic that is not without relevance to the poem. In the first part of A Dialogue of Self and Soul, Soul summons the poet away from the sword and up the winding stair to a contemplation of the heavens — and particularly to the moon in the fifteenth phase: "That quarter where all thought is done!" The soul urges:

Why should the imagination of a man
Long past his prime remember things that are
Emblematical of love and war?
Think of ancestral night that can,
If but imagination scorn the earth
And intellect its wandering
To this and that and t'other things,
Deliver from the crime of death and birth. 2

It is emblematical of the defeat and degradation that await all involvement with the noisy affair that active life too readily becomes.

The degradation awaits the man who woos a proud woman since here we feel that a personal factor is disturbing the elevated generality of the thought. In Vacillation, the poet

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 477.
2. Ibid.
gives vent to his sense of alienation:

My fiftieth year had come and gone,
I sat, a solitary man,
In a crowded London shop,
An open book and empty cup
On the marble table-top.

While on the shop and street I gazed
My body of a sudden blazed;
And twenty minutes more or less
It seemed, so great my happiness,
That I was blessed and could bless. 1

In Hibh At The Tomb Of Baile And Aillinn, the poet
grows gloomy and sorrow-stricken at the sight of lovers:

Here in the pitch-dark atmosphere above
The trembling of the apple and the yew,
Here on the anniversary of their death,
The anniversary of their first embrace,
Those lovers, purified by tragedy,
Hurry into each other's arms; these eyes,
By water, herb and solitary prayer
Made accoline, are open to that light.
Though somewhat broken by the leaves, that light
Lies in a circle on the grass; therein
I turn the pages of my holy book. 2

The last lines of Friends remember Maud Gonne again
in an extraordinary blend of bitterness and forgiveness:

2. Ibid., p. 555.
And what of her that took
All till my youth was gone
with scarce a pitying look?
How could I praise that one?
When day begins to break
I count my good and bad,
Being wakeful for her sake,
Remembering what she had.
What eagle look still shows,
while up from my heart's root
So great a sweetness flows.
I shake from head to foot.

An Irish Airman Foresees his Death achieves its effect through a nearly perfect neutralisation of forces. The 'lonely impulse' that drives the airman to his destiny is freed from all motivation and, therefore, totally self-expressive:

Those that I fight I do not hate,
Those that I guard I do not love,
My country is Kiltartan Cross,
My Countrymen Kiltartan's poor,

In The Spur the bitterness prevails and takes very unpleasant forms:

You think it horrible that lust and rage
Should dance attention upon my old age;
They were not such a plague when I was young;
What else have I to spur me into song?

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1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 315.
2. Ibid., p. 328.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p. 591.
As in Timon the heroic reverie is mocked by dawn and knave and harlot, in John Kinsella's Lament for Mrs. Mary Moore, he says:

what shall I do for pretty girls
Now my old bawd is dead? ¹

The punctuational history of Sailing to Byzantium, is just as complicated as that of A Prayer for my Daughter. The status of the body in this stanza has dwindled from:

An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick ..... ²

It is now something to be looked back upon, a momentary recollection which finds its right equivalent in a mere parenthetical interpolation before the surging imperative of "Consume my heart away".³ is resumed.

Throughout The wind among the Reeds, Yeats has enounced "a thirst for that hour when all things shall pass away like a cloud".⁴ He longs to be consumed into the ideal beauty he seeks: "I, too, await/The hour of thy great wind of love and hate".⁵ and in The Secret Rose he asks: "When

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1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.621.
2. Ibid., p.407.
3. Ibid., p.408.
4. Essays and Introductions, p.190.
5. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.170.
shall the stars be blown about the sky,/Like the sparks blown out of a smithy, and die?''

The purifying process of this work is most strictly revealed, however, in the poet's desire, his obsessive call for the death of the woman. In The Poet pleads with the Elemental Powers, circle is the traditional figure for perfection, while death promises a perfection, a finality. Finally, the suggestion of death carries with it the ultimate ether-like medium for Yeats' cultivation of the ideal woman, diffused and remote. He implores her to throw off her earthly qualities and to take on those vague and spectral characteristics with which we are now familiar. In each supplication, therefore, he divests her of materiality and enshrouds her in an almost funereal tableau, so strong is the association between the loving and the lifeless. In He wishes his Beloved were Dead, he says:

You would come hither, and bend your head,
And I would lay my head on your breast;
And you would murmur tender words,
Forgiving me, because you were dead: 2

And in these prayers, in The Lover asks Forgiveness because of his many moods, through a process of a certain essentialization, she becomes her hair: 'Crumple the rose in your

2. Ibid., p.175.
hair; And cover your lips with odorous twilight 
''And cover the pale blossoms of your breast/With you dim heavy hair''
And in He bids his Beloved be at Peace, he becomes part of the ever-deepening covering as he exhorts:

Beloved, let your eyes half close, and your heart beat Over my heart, and your hair fall over my breast, Browning love's lonely hour in deep twilight of rest.

It reveals a longing for "rest", the longing to "dwell beyond the stir/And tumult of defeated dreams". The Secret Rose, specifically suggests a union after death: the absolute closure in Nothingness. This folding over into infinity is mirrored in the equivalence of her heart beating over his heart, her hair over his breast, until even "love's lonely hour" is engulfed and the "Shadowy Horses" are enveloped by the Beloved's hair. Arthur Symons, in his article Mr. Yeats as a lyric poet, accentuates the significance of this union of poet and the object of his vision:

"Never in these love songs ..... does an earthly circumstance divorce estasy from the impersonality of vision. The poet cannot see love under the form of time, cannot see beauty except an absolute beauty, cannot distinguish between

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.162.
2. Ibid., p.163.
3. Ibid., p.154.
4. Ibid., p.169.
5. Ibid., p.154.
the mortal person and the eternal idea\textsuperscript{1}.

The evolution of The Wind among the Reeds has taken
the poet beyond the threshold of symbolic apocalypse, as
interested only in spiritual essence, he calls for the des-
truction of the material forms, which paradoxically, could
embody the essence he desires. The hunger for the ideal,
centered, for the poet-mystic, or perfection of the work,
and his inability to attain it has led him to desire cata-
clysm. In He mourns for the Change that has come upon him
and his Beloved, and longs for the End of the World, he
says:

I would that the Bear without bristles had
come from the West
And had rooted the sun and moon and stars
out of the sky
And lay in the darkness, grunting, and turning
to his rest.\textsuperscript{2}

The words threaten to fail, like those "hopes that in mere
hoping flicker and cease"\textsuperscript{3}. The Lover asks Forgiveness
because of his Many Moods, the absolute poem, as it approa-
ches realization, must destroy itself.

Yeats exploitation of his personality and of his
personal history is consciously dramatic. The resounding

\textsuperscript{1} Arthur Symons, Mr. Yeats as a Lyric Poet, Saturday
Review, XCI May 6, 1899.
\textsuperscript{2} The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.153.
\textsuperscript{3} Ibid., p.162.
dramatic effect achieved, there is very little to hold on to. The Tower is a record of struggle. The first poem declares that an excited imagination must in its owner's old age, be content to "deal/In Abstract things". But from this the poet's mind immediately sheers away, and the second poem introduces us abruptly into one of those Picture-galleries of persons of local legendary fame which Yeats has such skill in animating. There is Mrs. French, whose servingman brought her "an insolent farmer's ears" in "a little covered dish"; Mary Hynes, a Halon whose beauty led to small disaster in "the great bog of Cloone", Hanrahan "stumbled, tumbled, fumbled to and fro". We are brought back to the relevance of this procession:

Did all old men and women, rich and poor, who trod upon these rocks or passed this door, whether in public or in secret rage
As I do now against old age?

It is the "old lecher" Hanrahan, whom we may remember as having written a rhyming curse upon old age and in the

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 409.
2. Ibid., p. 410.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p. 411.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., p. 413.
7. Ibid.
context of gross sexuality preserved the poet's mind, is left brooding upon a further question:

Does the imagination dwell the most
Upon a woman won or woman lost? ¹

It was from a great "Labyrinth" ² that he had turned aside when pride or cowardice prompted him to relinquish Maud Gonne. And pride, it seems, is his last infirmity, since it emerges as the essential problem in the third poem, which is a testament. The poet must - again - climb down. He must "make" ³ his soul:

Compelling it to study
In a learned school, ⁴

and he will bequeath his pride, evoked in a series of splendid images, to young men who can still scale the mountains and touch the wellsprings of sensuous life. He himself renounces that life, and even its reflection in art:

I have prepared my peace
With learned Italian things
And the proud stone of Greece,
Poet's imaginings. ⁵

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1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.413.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p.416.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., p.415.
The Tower opens effectively enough, and the second section
promises to unfold the poem well, with:

I pace upon the battlements and stare
On the foundations of a house, or where
Tree, like a sooty finger, starts from the earth;
And send imagination forth
Under the day's declining beam, and call
Images and memories
From ruin or from ancient trees,
For I would ask a question of them all.¹

But thereafter, instead of fulfilment of the expectancy
aroused in these opening lines, we have a descent to anecdote:

Beyond that ridge lived Mrs. French, and once
When every silver candlestick or sconce
Lit up the dark mahogany and the wine,
A serving-man, that could divine
That most respected lady's every wish.²

And the poem continues in such a reminiscential, rambling,
inconsequent manner, only held together by the poet's rhythm-
ical and rhetorical skill in unfolding the theme of alien-
ation.

Yeats' creed consists in the not very interesting or
subtle exaltation of brute vitality:

'Whatever stands in field or flood,
Bird, beast, fish or man,
Marc or stallion, cock or hen,
Stands in God's unchanging eye
In all the vigour of its blood;
In that faith I live or die.'³

¹. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.409.
². Ibid., p.410.
³. Ibid., p.529.
In choosing perfection of the work in false opposition to perfection of the life, Yeats through his artistic devotedness, develops his theme of alienation without developing at the same time a wider and deeper insight into life, and his early other—worldliness, springing from a defect of deep and warm humanity, being too rarefied and phantasmal, found its level in the blood, lust and mud of the last poems. For Yeats there is no human means between the supernatural and the bestial, the inhuman purity of the moon and the animal ragings of the blood. The apotheosis of this tendency is to be seen in Yeats' last works, A Full Moon in March and the Last Poems and Plays:

In some of the poems, Why Should not Old Men be Mad?, Are You content?, What then?, Yeats questions himself, but then drowns any conceivable reply with a randy ballad or a ballad of violence, a political lampoon or marching song. "'Come swish around, my pretty punk'"\(^1\) alternates with "'The ghost of Roger Casement/Is beating on the door'"\(^2\) and "'The Roaring Tinker if you like,/But Mannion is my name,/And I beat up the common sort/And think it is no shame'"\(^3\).

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1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.591.
2. Ibid., p.584.
3. Ibid., p.605.
He invariably feels, "The fascination of what's difficult". In another poem entitled *A Coat*, he says:

I made my song a coat
Covered with embroideries
Out of old mythologies
From heel to throat;
But the fools caught it,
Wore it in the world's eyes
As though they'd wrought it.
Song, let them take it,
For there's more enterprise
In walking naked.  

The *white birds* best reflects Yeats' theme of self-alienation. In the first stanza the speaker desires an ideal state which is not possible, that he and his lover might be "white birds on the foam of the sea". But this is a different ideal than that sought by the spiritual alchemists, as the second stanza makes clear:

A weariness comes from those dreamers, dew-dabbled, the lily and rose;
Ah, dream not of them, my beloved, the flame of the meteor that goes,
Or the flame of the blue star that lingers hung low in the fall of the dew:
For I would be were changed to white birds on the wandering foam: I and you!

Indeed the speaker wishes to avoid thinking of the alchemist's ideal because he does not wish to submit himself to the

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2. Ibid., p. 320.
3. Ibid., p. 121.
4. Ibid., p. 122.
necessary destruction.

The cramp of the poverty over the years of his expansion, no doubt, made him fond of thinking how had every one had his rights, he might have been Duke of Ormonde. And his physique, his mental bias, and his courage were aristocratic. During the war he told with a caustic satisfaction how a gutter-snipe had shrilled from just beneath his towering figure. In An Irish Airman Foresees his Death, he says:

No likely end could bring them loss
Or leave them happier than before.
Nor law, nor duty bade me fight,
Nor public men, nor cheering crowds.\(^1\)

Sailing to Byzantium delineates the pursuit of an intellectual, or a spiritual passion in order to efface the physical infirmities of old age. Of equal significance, though, is the divesting which must take place before the liberating psychological happening, the immersion in an entirely aesthetic milieu, can occur. The price of transcending the physical world is the suppression of the emotions associated with the heart because it is "sick with desire/ And fastened to a dying animal"\(^2\).

In The Tower, Yeats indicates why the solution proposed in the foregoing poem cannot unremittingly be applied. He

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1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 328
2. Ibid., p. 409
then dramatizes an alternative and equally inventive solution to the circumstance which has simultaneously challenged and frustrated the speakers of both poems.

The dilemma is common to both poems identified by the speaker in the initial section of The Tower when he asks his "troubled heart" what he should do with the absurdity of his decrepit body. He then implies that the solution of the speaker in the previous poem is unsatisfactory, for the speaker of The Tower seemingly regards the feelings of the heart as the muse of the imagination. To relinquish his heart, and thereby achieve the victory of transcendence is to gut his imagination. The speaker says:

As I would question all, come all who can;  
Come old, necessitous, half-mounted man;  
And bring beauty's blind rambling celebrant;  
The red man the juggler sent  
Through God-forsaken meadows; Mrs. French,  
Gifted with so fine an ear;  
The man drowned in a bog's mire,  
When mocking Muses chose the country wench.  

Yeats' first long stay at Coole in the summer of 1897 was the most memorable time of his life. His mistress Olivia had left him after a year-long liaison. His impossible love for Maud Gonne remained a persistent agony to him:

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 409.  
2. Ibid., p. 412.
Often as I walked in the woods at Coole it would have been a belief to have screamed aloud. When desire became an unendurable torture, I would masturbate, and that, no matter how moderate I was, would make me ill. It never occurred to me to seek another love. I would repeat to myself again and again the last confession of Lancelot, and indeed it was my greatest pride, I have loved a queen beyond measure and exceeding long. 1

Yet Coole and its swan-filled lake had a special positive significance for Yeats separate from all this misery. He had fortuitously come to Coole after a medium's evocation had told him 'to live near water and to avoid woods, which concentrate the solar power'. 2 Instead of avoiding those solar woods, where his own morbid self-absorption was likely to be concentrated, Yeats haunted them. His salutary contact with the lunar influence came from expeditions to the colleges with Lady Gregory, where they gathered folk beliefs, and from his occasional glimpses through the woods towards Coole Lake and its swans.

In The Wild Swans at Coole, the poet is stuck in static despondency. He opens and closes in the present, and whenever he moves backward or forward in time, he is brought up short. For the rejected suitor who has built the myth of his life around one woman for over twenty-five

2. Ibid., p.100.
years, there are no sustained flights, either of imagination or of memory. The climatic final stanza speculates on the departure of the swans to an open future. The perception, "'when I awake some day/To find they have flown away?'"¹, is broken off by Yeats' lament for his broken heart. "'I have looked upon those brilliant creatures,/And now my heart is sore'"². Yeats prefers to keep the swans floating on the lake, where he can continue to possess what is left to him of their special meaning. The climax of 1916 is an anti-climax; rather than dramatic departure and new life, he offers the stasis of landscape painting:

Unwearied still, lover by lover,
They paddle in the cold
Companionable streams or climb the air;
Their hearts have not grown old;
Passion or conquest, wander where they will,
Attend upon them still."³

It makes no difference whether the swans paddle or climb. What matters is the contrast between their companionable hearts, which have grown old, and the solitary poet's which has grown alienated. While "'passion or conquest, wander where they will;/Attend upon them still', the only attendant the poet has is the nagging memory of an ideal past out of

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1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.323.
2. Ibid., p.322.
3. Ibid., p.323.
reach and of a present filled with self-pity.

In The Man Who Dreamed of Faeryland, the vision of unity, embodied in the dancer, is suggested in the dreamer's awareness that

...........somewhere to north or west or south
There dwelt a gay, exulting, gentle race
Under the golden or the silver skies;
That if a dancer stayed his hungry foot
It seemed the sun and moon were in the fruit:
And at that singing he was no more wise.¹

Having suggested solar and lunar unity, Yeats resolves all divisions in the image of God's unity with Nature and further employs the dancer² as its tangible symbol. The dreamer, having lost love finds "no comfort in the grave"³; death has shattered the dream:

Did not the worms and spired about his bones
Proclaim with that unweari'd, reedy cry
That God has laid His fingers on the sky,
That from those fingers glittering summer runs
Upon the dancer by the dreamless wave.⁴

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1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.127.

2. The poem displays Yeats' symbolist technique developing in richness; the gold and silver of the first stanza are blended in the second with its dancer and its golden and silver skies and the sun and moon.


4. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.128.

4. Ibid.
The "cold/And Passionate" fisherman is mainly an abstraction and a symbol. Yeats insists that the fisherman is a "man who does not exist,/A man who is but a dream." William Wordsworth gives to leech gatherer a moral and symbolical significance similar to Yeats' fisherman. A comparative study of the two poems reveals that the last two lines of this quotation function as an appropriate epigraph for The Fisherman.

In addition to these major correspondences between Resolution and Independence and The Fisherman, there are a number of minor echoes in the two poems. Both poets describe the hour of the encounter as dawn or early morning. In each case a rocky, elevated spot is mentioned.

Yeats says:

The freckled man who goes
To a grey place on a hill. 4

and:

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.346.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid. Wordsworth continues:
   As a huge stone is sometimes seen to be
   Couch'd on the bald top of an eminence.
4. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.347.
Climbing up to a place
where stone is dark under froth, 1

Lapis Lazuli presents three types of self-alienation pertaining to the artist, the constructive worker and the saint respectively, as contrasted with the sentimental hysteria of weak women, overwhelmed with sense of panic at the prospect of another German invasion, and crying for some immediate effective remedy to avert or stop the threatening holocaust. The poet is amused by their hysteria and makes light of their panic:

I have heard that hysterical women say
They are sick of the palette and fiddle-bow,
Of poets that are always gay,
For everybody knows or else should know
That if nothing drastic is done
Aeroplane and Zeppelin will come out,
Pitch like King Billy bomb-balls in
Until the town lie beaten flat. 2

The second stanza takes up the word 'gay' and explains the meaning of the self-alienation of the artist, which is born of a deeper insight into the nature of tragedy. In the Poetics Aristotle makes the positive statement that tragedy, as an artform, must yield delight peculiar to it which reminds us of equally significant remark of Yeats himself in On the Boiler:

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 348.
2. Ibid., p. 565.
The arts are all the bridal chambers of joy. No tragedy is legitimate unless it leads some great character to his final joy. Polonius may go out wretchedly, but I can hear the dance music in 'Absent thee from felicity a while', or in Hamlet's speech over the dead Ophelia, and what of Cleopatra's last farewells; Lear's rage under the lightning, Oedipus sinking down at story's end into an earth 'riven' by love? Some Frenchman has said that farce is the struggle against a ridiculous object, comedy against a movable object, tragedy against an immovable; and because the will, or energy, is greatest in tragedy, tragedy is the more noble; but I add that 'will or energy, is eternal delight', and when its limits is reached it may become a pure aimless joy, though the man, the shade, still mourns his last object.¹

He refers to the great Shakespearean tragic figures who walk proudly on 'The great stage'² to play their roles and 'If worthy their prominent part'³, they will never 'break up their lines to weep'⁴ and lament over their fate. The actors and actresses performing these roles on the stage, must know that the great tragic heroes, 'Hamlet and Lear are gay'⁵ and they find:

Gaiety transfiguring all that dread.⁶

And this gaiety of their heart has transformed all the horror of the dark event about to engulf them. Man opposes

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1. Explorations, p. 446.
2. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 565.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
his indomitable will against the power and intensity of tragedy and wrings delight out of it.

Step by step these tragic heroes are deprived of all their possessions and their noble aspirations, and a pall of darkness envelops them:

All men have aimed at, found and lost;
Black out; .........................

But out of this darkness issues the light which illumines their soul "Heaven blazing into the head". The progress of a tragic hero is a march from darkness into light, from ignorance unto knowledge, from the surface of suffering unto the joy hidden in its bosom. The tragic artist takes his stand upon the integrity of the heroic individual, who may be a symbol of humanity, but does not cease to be an individual. The whole tragedy of the race is concentrated in the tragedy of an individual, pitched to the highest possible limit, so that thousands of tragedies taking place on thousands of the stages in the real world cannot add a jot to its intensity. Hamlet and Lear may go mad and become hysterical, but their hysteria is radically different from that of the "hysterical women", because it is the delirium

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.566.
2. Ibid.
of the brave as distinguished from the emotional collapse of the multitude:

Though Hamlet rambles and Lear rages,
And all the drop-scenes drop at once
Upon a hundred thousand stages,
It cannot grow by an inch or an ounce. ¹

Edward Engelberg has well commented:

In this most assertive poem, Yeats sets the individual tragic impulse against the 'public spirit' of the body politic. Sometimes the Greeks would use their chorus for voicing that spirit, it balanced the tragic hero. When Odeipus speaks out of the most vehement passions he is conscious of the presence of the chorus, men before whom he must keep up appearances ----(men) who do not share his passion', Hysteria is passion socialized, the tragic hero never submits to it. ²

In the stanza which follows the poet describes the joy of men of action who build a new civilization out of the debris of the old one. For civilizations also are subject to the law of death and rebirth:

On their own feet they came, or on shipboard,
Camel-back, horse-back, ass-back, mule-back,
Old civilizations put to the sword
Then they and their wisdom went to rack:
No handiwork of Callimachus,
Who handled marble as if it were bronze,
Made draperies that seemed to rise
When sea-wind swept the corner, stands;
His long lamp-chimney shaped like the stem
Of a slender palm, stood but a day;
All things fall and are built again,
And those that built them again are gay. ³

¹ The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.566.
³ The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.566.
The last section takes up the consideration of the gaiety of the sages, sitting on the high altitude of their philosophical wisdom and contemplating the tragedy enacting itself in the world below. The reference is to the piece of Lapis Lazuli, the poet got as a gift on which were carved two Chinamen in the foreground, with a third figure behind them. Over their heads "a long-legged bird"\(^1\), symbol of their long life, was shown on its wings, the third figure, obviously a serving man, had a musical instrument in his hands. The piece of Lapis Lazuli was very old:

Every discoloration of the stone,  
Every accidental crack or dent,  
Seems a water-course or an avalanche,  
Or lofty slope where it still snows  
Though doubtless plum or cherry-branch  
Sweetens the little half-way house  
Those Chinamen climb towards, and I  
Delight to imagine them seated there;  
There, on the mountain and the sky,  
On all the tragic scene they stare.  
One asks for mournful melodies;  
Accomplished fingers begin to play.  
Their eyes mid many wrinkles, their eyes,  
Their ancient, glittering eyes, are gay.\(^2\)

In *An Acre of Grass*, the old poet refers to the conventional ideal of the peaceful life when the strength of body has declined. He can pass his quiet days with "Picture and Book"\(^3\) which are enough to recreate his mind, just as

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1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.566.  
2. Ibid., p.567.  
3. Ibid., p.575.
"An acre of green grass"\footnote{1} can provide him space enough "For air and exercise"\footnote{2} to keep the body going on. He should sit in his "old house"\footnote{3}, meditate in the stillness of "Midnight"\footnote{4} where the stirring of "a mouse"\footnote{5} alone can disturb the "quiet"\footnote{6} place.

This "quiet" at the end of life is certainly a strong temptation. The time warrants neither wild flights of imagination in the dream land, nor that philosophical activity of all mind which is busy organizing and ordering the thoughts, impressions and impulses which constitute its raw material. Both these activities are futile to discover wisdom and truth.

The poet contemptuously rejects this conventional picture of the quiet old age. He prays for "an old man's frenzy"\footnote{7}, the passionate energy which drives a man on and on and allows him not even a moment's rest. This was the frenzy which made Timon such a terrible figure in his adversity, pouring his scorn and malediction on the rotten society.

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1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 575.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., p. 576.
It was the Frenzy of Old Lear, who, naked and unprotected, set the fury of wind and storm and all the might of the wicked world at defiance.

The last old man on whom the old poet desires to model his life is Michael Angelo (1475-1564), the celebrated Italian artist, the old man with eagle-mind whose gaze could "pierce the clouds" to arrive at the mysteries of heaven or in his prophetic inspiration could pierce the tombs and "shake the dead in their shrouds". The poet wants to have this passionate and indomitable will to cram his days with activity, in the absence of which the life of the old man is worthless and fit for being flung on the scrap-heap of time. He wants to have that raging, ravening mind "an old man's eagle mind" which can penetrate into the desolation of reality and give him a full taste of life's experience at the same time.

A Bronze Head is about a woman whose perfect beauty eluded him and the world, precisely because it was statuesque. Yeats ascribes to the bust of Maud Gonne which is the subject of the poem the aristocratic disdain which became so strong in himself as he reached old age. Her supernatural

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2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
eye looks out and seems willing to slaughter all. But what
besides willingness to slaughter has wasted her form? The
bust is of her in old age, "whithered and mummy-dead,"1,
and worse, become some "great tomb-haunter,"2, a sort of
vulture in the distant sky. The slaughterer of all that is
common and the vulturine tomb-haunter are the same, the
idealism that purifies the human countenance wasting it to
nothing in the end. In poems like Peace or A Thought from
Propertius, Maud Gonne becomes Hellenic and Phidian because
she is far above the contemporary world. Thus, the statue
has an oddly complex and discordant significance as a sexual
image in these late poems, an image that comes directly from
Yeats' lifelong habit of conflating two opposed aspects of
sculpture.

Thus, Yeats believes that in modern age man is now
beginning to be at war with himself. He has turned his own
mind against himself. The spontaneous assertion of individ-
dual initiative, feelings, wishes and opinions has been
stunted, warped and choked. A general weakening of the
bonds between men, between communities and institutions has
nurtured feelings of inadequacy and apathy. Most of man's
alienated behaviour is the result of an unauthentic self.

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.618.
2. Ibid.