CHAPTER IV
ON POETS AND POETRY

I

If it be true that God is a circle whose centre is everywhere, the saint goes to the centre, the poet and artist to the ring where everything comes round again.(E&J 287)

This is how William Butler Yeats explains the task of a poet and an artist in his essay "The Cutting of Agate." Poetry as a genus of expression of emotions, and the role of the poet in the society formed the locus of Yeats’ poetic beliefs. Since his ideology and his poetry are intrinsically connected and often comment on one another, his theory of versification is embodied not only in his essays and letters but also in many of his poems, dealing with issues related to writing of poetry. Also since most of Yeats’ preoccupations in life had roots in his youth itself, he began to promulgate his views on poets and poetry quite early in his critical career. An editor and freelance critic, writing for numerous journals and magazines, Yeats appeared a wandering soul, consistently combining an immense need for revelation and belief, with an intense and critical scepticism; making it difficult to determine exactly what he believed in and when. His inclination towards poetics and his lifelong interest in theatre precipitated by his proclivity towards drama and his penchant for dialogues enabled him to stage conflicts between opposing principles, voices and moods(Howes 2).

A forceful proponent of Irish literary Revival, an active and scheming participant in various clubs and societies, or an exponent of English literary Theatre, whatever persona Yeats assumed, there was never a disconnect with literature and especially poetry which, to him, was a superlative art form. With growing age and sensibility, his critical perceptions also matured. From early sentimental appraisal of Sir Samuel Ferguson’s craft and naïve adulation of popular literature; he moved on to critique the esoteric, the scholarly and the complex in the creative and critical canon of his times. On the personal front, too, from a fledging poet, writing in a rather effeminate style about love and longing, Yeats morphed into one who began to write in a masculine tenor the woes of the modern world. His varied interests and experiments with genres provided a broader foundation for his critical credo. The present chapter is an endeavour to gauge the depth, vigour and extent of his critique on poets and poetry down the ages.
Impelled by the conviction that his age of criticism is about to pass, an age of imagination, of emotion, of moods, of revelation [is] about to come in its place (E&I 197), Yeats anticipated a greater role for both the poet and poetry in the new age. Yeats approved of Shelley's contention as propounded in A Defence of Poetry that a poet not only beholds intensely the present as it is, and discovers those laws according to which present things are to be ordained, but he beholds the future in the present, and his thoughts are the germs of the flowers and the fruit of the latest times (E&I 67). Yeats further endorsed certain beliefs of Shelley's poetic philosophy: Poetry is the creation of actions, according to the unchangeable process of human nature, as existing in the mind of the creator, which is itself the image of all other minds (67). He also agreed with Shelley's view: Language, colour, form, and religious and civil habits of action are all the instruments and materials of poetry (67).

Firmly believing in the superiority of poetry as a form of knowledge and its permanence as opposed to the temporal state of other art forms or religion, in the essay The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry, Yeats affirmed his unshakeable belief that whatever of philosophy has been made poetry is alone permanent, and that one should begin to arrange it in some regular order, rejecting nothing as the make-believe of the poets (E&I 65). Yeats' notion of poetry as subjective and personal rendering of one's inner most recesses was an extension of his father's perception of it. J. B. Yeats had, in a letter to W. B Yeats, observed:

It should never be forgotten that poetry is the voice of the solitary spirit, prose the language of the sociable minded. Solitary feeling is the substance of poetry. Facile emotion, persuasion, opinion and argument and moral purpose are the substance of prose. (Yeats, J. B. 48)

Moreover, J. B. Yeats had also infused into the young Yeats that poetry and art were forms of truth superior to all others and in no way separated from life (Ellmann, xxviii). Thus inspired, Yeats defined a poem as an elaboration of the rhythms of common speech and their association with profound feeling (E&I 508). He also believed that the persons and passions in our poems are mainly reflections our mirror has caught from older poems or from the life about us, but the wise comments we make upon them, the criticism of life we wring from their fortunes (196). Yeats, however, was also totally opposed to the Arnoldian belief of regarding poetry as the criticism of life. He contended: believe that all men will more and more reject the opinion that poetry is a criticism of life and be more and more convinced that it is a revelation of hidden life (L 36).
Analogous to these notions were Yeats’s deliberations on simplicity of thought and clear rendering of the poetic idea as essential elements of poetry. He posited: “We should write our own thoughts in as nearly as possible the language we thought them in, as though in a letter to an intimate friend” (Au 63). Consequently, Yeats did not approve of either generalizations in poetry or deviations from the internal expressions of the soul to address political, social, moral, scientific or natural phenomena. Rebutting any sort of disjunction between subject and object, he rejected any poetry based on external experience rather than the poet’s consciousness. Thus much before Eliot gave the idea of Disassociation of Sensibility, Yeats had dismissed as superfluous Wordsworth’s detachable ideas, Keats’s fragmentary sensuous beauty as also the works of their Victorian followers who failed to yoke together the discordant elements into one image. He found these poets lacking in their ability to achieve Unity of Being which Yeats felt was quintessential feature of good poetry and was abundantly found in the old poems. Ensuing this, he implicated the Victorians for their preference for popular poetry which to him seemed dissociated, artificial and dishonest in its perceptions and expressions (Ex 163). A corresponding dissonance was perceived by him in modern poetry as well. He deemed it to be devoid of expressive unity, and censured it for displaying only an occasional outstanding passage or a memorable moment. Also, Yeats was perhaps more conscious than most others of the essential indivisibility of a poem. Considering it an organic whole, he emphasized on formulating such poems which were devoid of any superficial or redundant elements.

Accentuating spontaneity as an essential feature of poetry, Yeats felt that poetry should not be a conscious exercise and should come directly from the recesses of the mind. Conversely and quite ironically, he also realized that it was a hard toil and an intense unnatural labour. He conceded that he could compose only four or five lines a day (L 710). In fact, this issue of the arduousness of poetical compositions found mention not only in his letters and essays but in many of his poems spanning over his volumes from The Wind among the Reed (1899) to The Wild Swans of Coole (1919). He also views the art of versification as a struggle between the poet’s will and his own weakness, a creative conflict between conscious self and the unconscious forces. Convinced that only that poetry which contains the actual thoughts of a man at a passionate moment of life can move us, he sought to write out of his emotions exactly as they came to him, not changing them to make them more beautiful (Au 63). In this context, Yeats stated thus:
If I can be sincere and make my language natural, and without becoming discursive, like a novelist, and so indiscreet and prosaic, I shall, if good luck or bad luck make my life interesting, be a great poet, for it will be no longer a matter of literature at all. (Au 63)

Thus poetry for Yeats was a process of enhancement and rejuvenation. Schricker posits that it was ō a matter of making himself...of refining or raising his personal identity into a whole and universal structureō (23). Yeats was also aware of the impediments and challenges which a poet has to overcome to become a perfect artist. The chasm between the intention to write and the actual act of writing a verse could be frustrating and arduous, sometimes because of the lack of inspiration or imagination to put the idea across in befitting words and expressions. Referring to the strain and exhaustion that he suffered during the composition of his poetry, in his Autobiography he posited:

Metrical composition is always very difficult to me, nothing is done upon the first day, not one rhythm is in its place and when at last the Rhymes begins to come, the first rough draft of a six-line stanza takes the whole day. At that time (early 1890s), I had not formed a style, and sometimes a six-line stanza would take several days, and not seemed finished even then and I had not learnt, as I have now, to put it all out of my head before night, and so the last night was generally sleepless, and the last day a day of nervous strain. (Au 122)

In ōAdamiamondō Cursediamond also he takes up the issue of tedium of writing poetry so as to give it the semblance of an effortless task, natural to the poet:

I said, ōA Line will take us hours maybe;
Yet if it does not seem a momentdiamond thought
Our stitching and unstitching has been naught...diamond (CW I 78)

Yeatsdiamond poetic thought and poetry was largely based on the idea of exploring and expanding the possibilities of verbal art especially poetry with the help of visual arts. Firmly believing art to be subservient to life, Yeats celebrated the freedom of the soul to express itself according to its own laws and arranging the world about it in its own patterns. This ideology was expounded and manifested in his views on poetry as well. According to him, poetry must blend together the factual and autobiographical element with art to achieve a
synthesis which could reflect every aspect of life in literature. In Richard Ellmann's opinion, his sense of an ulterior responsibility drove him to seek always for patterns and pictures, and to hack and hew at his life until it reached the parabolic meaningfulness he found necessary. He must speak for his generation as well as for himself, and reveal the truth about both \( \textit{Mask} 2 \).

Perceiving inherent relationship and intuitive coherence between art and poetry, Yeats drew analogies from the visual arts to tide over abstractions, and to concretize his poetic ideas. Quite early in his literary career, he realized that generalizations about life and art do not make good poetry. In his autobiography, he affirmed that he was content only when his abstractions had composed themselves into pictures and dramatization \( \textit{188} \). To avoid abstractions and vagueness, which he believed, destroy poetry and mar the fibre of poetic excellence, he recommended the use of symbols. This is apparent from his assertion to A.E.:

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\text{I think I would myself avoid it in poetry for the same reason that I would avoid haunted because vague forms, pictures, scenes etc are rather a modern idea of the poetic and I would not want to call up a modern kind of picture... All ancient vision was definite and precise. (L 343)}
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In his autobiography, Yeats recorded that vague and intangible words dampen the effect of poetry and that a heart-rending poetic piece must contain the actual thoughts of a man at a passionate moment of life \( \textit{62} \). He advocated a deliberate use of words and expression rather than grammatical punctuation to express supra-rational thoughts in a clear and lucid manner, avoiding any kind of ambiguity. Ellmann agrees thus: \( \text{A poem, even when it begins with an actual experience distorts, heightens, simplifies and transmutes... (Mask 5)} \). Thus it is difficult to set apart the two the actual experience, and the work of art which is an outcome of the former. It is especially true in the case of Yeats because it is difficult to discern his state of mind, for he often moved forward and backwards between his creative persona and his real self with all its experiences and experiments. In all its varied forms, Yeats wanted poetry to be passionate, based on lyrical experience. In a letter to Ellen OâLeary, Yeats recorded:

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\text{Words are always getting conventionalized to some secondary meaning. It is one of the works of poetry to take the truants in custody and bring them back to their right}
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senses. Poets are the policemen of language; they are always arresting these old reprobates, the words. (L 109-10)

Credited with conceptualizing afresh the platonic problem of art-reality relationship to give poets their due in the society, Yeats sincerely believed that these arts exist to keep our passions alive and asserted that if a man was to write lyric poetry, he must be shaped by nature and art to someone out of half a dozen of traditional poses, and be a lover or saint, sage or sensualist or a mere mocker of all life. Correspondingly, he also believed: Lyrical poems, when they but speak of emotions common to all, require not indeed a religious belief like the spiritual arts, but a life that has leisure for itself, and a society that is quickly stirred that our emotion may be strengthened by the emotion of others (Au 53).

However, Yeats further refurbished the definition and the role of a poet in the society. To him, a poet essentially dealt with ideas and abstractions derived from real life which he construed as reality and then reconstructed them in new forms and shapes. The poetic theory of Yeats overthrew Plato’s recommendation as encapsulated in The Republic of giving prominence to a philosopher over the poet. Plato had denigrated the role of a poet in the society as peripheral on the pretext that he is farthest removed from reality. Later Aristotle had rectified his master’s theory by considering a poet vital to the fabric of the society, and by regarding him as a creator who, based on his study of the reality, produces new forms and shapes, which are mimetic of reality. Yeats’ own belief was based on imaginative supremacy of poetry as the personal re-creation of experience, a form of transmutation from angst to serene expression of subjective emotions.

The dichotomy between the two sides of the self—the one that observes and the other that participates in the creative action formed the basis of Yeats’ personal vision which, in turn, leads to personal utterance in poetic form. Moreover, for Yeats, poetry was not merely a linear expression of emotions, moods or situations; it was the realization of the conflict within. According to Denis Donoghue The sense of consciousness as conflict is the most important article in Yeats’ faith as a poet (Donoghue 40). This is reiterated in his essay Synge and the Ireland of His Times wherein he says:

I think that all noble things are the result of warfare; great notions and classes, of warfare in the visible world, great poetry and philosophy, of invisible warfare, the division of a mind within itself, a victory, the sacrifice of a man to himself. (E&I 321)
Analogous to this idea, Yeats also differentiated between a poet and a saint. He believed that while the poet seeks inspiration from the consciousness of this dichotomy and the quarrel between the two halves of the self, a saint tries to reconcile the warring halves. Concurrently, Yeats developed the theory of Masks as a device to be used by poets to present two different entities - the self and the anti-self in a more elaborate and dramatic style. He was convinced that the mask made poetry not only terse and succinct but also more theatrical, consciously dramatic (My 334). His association with the dramatic art further urged him to expound the theory of masks. He used it as a tool to lend dramatic quality to his lyrics. Richard Ellmann in his classic study Yeats: The Man and the Masks records: ‘The doctrine of the mask is so complex and central in Yeats that we can hardly attend to it closely. The mask is the social self [it] includes all the differences between one’s own and other people’s conception of one’s personality. In addition, mask is defensive armour. Finally, the mask is a weapon of defence (Mask 175-6). Yeats was certain that in order to create impressively moving poems, the artist must have the energy to assume the mask of the other self; that all joyous or creative life is a re-birth as something not oneself; something which has no memory and is created in a moment and perpetually renewed (qtd. in Ellmann 177).

Besides, Yeats’s poetics and poetry had an intrinsic connection with his prose pieces. He used the prose not only to comment on his own poetry but also to provide enduring insights, analytical study and sometimes revelations about art, poetry and poets. Helped in this endeavour by his stint with journalism and review-writing, Yeats developed a distinct prose style to expound his critical notions which distinguishes his literary criticism from that of others. In fact, apart from writing insightful essays, he even conceptualized his poems as a sketch or a prose draft which he later painstakingly put (it) in rhythm (My 325).

In an endeavour to amend his poetic criticism to suit the changing and maturing sensibilities of the epoch, Yeats elaborated his vision of poetics and his own poetry, and theorized on the various aspects of this genre. Conceptualizing lyrics or short poems, and long poems as two distinct entities, he differentiated between the two in the tradition of Milton, Virgil and the Romantics who saw lyrics as diversions from the true poetic pursuits of the long poem. In a letter to Katherine Tynan, Yeats elaborated thus: ‘A long poem should be a region into which one should wander from the cares of life’ (L106). His concept echoed Keats’s similar notion of poems as expounded in The Letters of John Keats wherein Keats
regarded it as a little region to wander in where they may pick and choose, and which the images are so numerous that many are forgotten and found new in a second reading. In addition, it was as a refuge from the oppressive and unsocial environment around him that led Yeats to conjecture what a poem should enfold and entail. While Yeats agreed with Mallarme that lyric would take precedence over long poems because of an incessant arduous search for an almost disembodied ecstasy, yet he was also convinced that long poems would continue to be popular with the poets:

I think we will not cease to write long poems, but rather that we will write them more and more as our new belief makes the world plastic under our hands again. (E&I 194)

Meanwhile, though, his initial venture into writing narrative and dramatic poetry was not of much consequence, his recognition, as a minor poet, was secured with the publication of a long poem The Wandering of Oisin. Later, in a lecture delivered in Dublin in 1893, Yeats categorized poetry into three distinct phases - epic, dramatic poetry and lyric poetry, which he believed shared a close affinity amongst themselves. He placed English poetry in the third phase, lyric, marked as it was with subtlety of language, obscurity and intricate utterance (UP I 271) while Ireland was perceived to be in the epic stage. He claimed: Alone, perhaps, among the nations of Europe we are in our ballad or epic age (273). Yeats endeavoured to reconcile both the phases with the dramatic for he also realized that the dramatic medium was perhaps the most powerful medium of poetic expression. In an article Yeats also defined heroic poetry as under:

Heroic poetry is a phantom figure swept over all the strings, arousing from man's whole nature a song of answering harmony. It is the poetry of action for such alone can arouse the whole nature of man. It touches all the strings - those of wonder and pity, of fear and joy. It ignores morals, for its business is not in any way to make us rules for life, but to make character. It is not, as a great English writer has said, a criticism of life, but rather a fire in the spirit, burning away what is mean and deepening what is shallow. (82-4)

The quintessential features of a poet were also described in detail by Yeats in his various essays. The conviction that an artist is chosen by destiny to achieve more than the ordinary mortal underlined Yeats' poetics. He advocated poets to both live the life and to
embrace the wholeness of that life as his Daimon and to embrace it again in his creation (Olney 49). Yeats also asserted that the artist should take care not to project his life as mere
chronicle, but inform it through symbolic imagination for it to have any meaning. He averred
“We artists are not the servants of any cause but of mere naked life, and above all of that life
in its nobler forms, where joy and sorrow are one, artificers of the great moment (E&I
260). Related to this was his assertion that creativity leads a poet to forget the original
impulse and to devote himself whole heartedly to poetic construction in hand which further
ensured a genuine inventiveness. Similarly, in a General Introduction for my Work, Yeats
outlined the dual nature of the poet’s identity wherein on the one hand, a poet writes always
of his personal life, in his finest work out of the tragedy, whatever it be, remorse, lost love, or
mere loneliness (509) and on the other hand, the process of poetic creation transformed this
poetic self into a universal self. Even when the poet seems most himself he has been
reborn as an idea, something intended, complete. He is more type than man, more passion
than type (Schricker 23). In a lecture on Lionel Johnson, Yeats reiterated:

I have no sympathy with the mid-Victorian thought ... that a poet’s life concerns
nobody but himself. A poet is by the very nature of the thing a man who lives with
entire sincerity, or rather, the better his poetry the more sincere his life. His life is an
experiment in living and those that come after have a right to know it. Above all, it is
necessary that the lyric poet’s life should be known, that we should understand that
his poetry is no rootless flower but as the speech of a man. (qtd. in Ellmann, Mask 5)

Likewise in the poem The Scholar, he recalls the plight of a Romantic poet:
solitary, lonely and self-conscious which foregrounds the heroic isolation of the poet.
Whatever the persona of the poet, Yeats was convinced that a poet’s ecstasy arises from the
contemplation of things vaster than the barrenness and shallowness of a conscious
arrangement (Jafferes, Man n.pag.), nevertheless, he completely rejected the idea of granting
a special exalted status to a poet or an artist:

Why should a man cease to be a scholar, a believer, a ritualist before he begins to
paint or rhyme or compose music or why if he has a strong head should he put away
any means of power? (E&I 353)

Indubitably, Yeats’s theory of art and poetry in particular is fundamentally woven
within the fibre of his beliefs and tenets of the system which he developed and manifested
principally in his prose, poetry, and especially *A Vision*. His theory of versification is also reflected in a selection of his poems. These poems may be regarded as a unique genre for they dwell primarily on the art of prosody, and the technical difficulties of writing poetry. Strewn across his volumes from *The Wind among the Reeds* (1899) to *The Wild Swan at Coole* (1919), such poems mark a significant period of his own spectacular growth as a poet, although he ignored this topic in his later poetry. This metapoetical concern in Yeats’s poetry points towards important connections between Yeats’s philosophy and his understanding of the poetic form. From *Adam’s Curse* to the beginning of *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* (1917), this theme is evident in Yeats’s poetics. In a letter to Kathrine Tynan, while evaluating his own prosody and poetics, Yeats reveals his realization of what good poetry should be, he writes:

I have noticed some things about my poetry that I did not know before, in this process of correction; for instance that it is almost a flight into fairyland from the real world and a summons to flight that is not the poetry of insight and knowledge, but of longing and complaint- the cry of the heart against necessity. (*L* 63)

The poems which exemplify Yeatsian anxiety for form and his absorption with the perfect structuring of his poems are paradigmatic of the concerns of all poets. The issues which he raised in these poems are not the concerns of a particular individual but of the community of poets who face these challenges time and again. Hence if in *Among School Children* there is a passing reference to the origin of poetic art when he talks of beauty born out of despair; in *Adam’s curse*, Yeats treats poetry-writing as an arduous task which must apparently seem effortless and spontaneous, although it may receive its final form after much deliberation and revision. He conceded that poetry did not come easily to him and that he had to toil rather hard to fit his thoughts into rhythm.

Another aspect of poetry or poet’s craft which finds prominence in Yeats’s poetry and prose alike has been the issue of desertion of creativity. This crisis of loss of new situations, themes and images haunts many a poets. Yeats manifests this predicament through his poem *Circus Animals*Desertion.*The poem is a treatise on the process of poetry writing wherein he draws a correlation between the poet and his creativity. The last stanza also highlights how the *masterful images* may grow in a poet’s mind which actually originates in his heart. In the same poem, Yeats compares the heart to an old junk shop full of refuse which the mind
may turn into wonderful poetic pieces: Old kettles, old bottles, and a broken can, /Old iron, old bones, old ragé  (SP 202).

Thus Yeats voices a typically poetic concern for the poets - the depletion of poetic themes, and soon concludes that devoid of fresh inspiration, he has no option but to enumerate old themes. Yeats also talks about his frantic search for an appropriate subject: "I sought a theme, and sought for it in vain and later is confounded by the origin of it: Those masterful images because complete/ Grew in pure mind, but out of what began? (SP 201-2). This poem, while revealing the process of poetic creation which initiates in the heart, also underscores how the motive behind the artistic effort is usually soon forgotten and the creator gets engrossed in capturing in words imaginative intent and emotions. He was certain that the ladder of poetic imagination which rises upwards to the sky is planted in the junk shop of the heart. In other words, imagination worked upon the confused heap of impressions and emotions in the poet’s heart. Consequently, the construction or the poetic structure gained prominence over all other issues. Yeats equated the characters, themes and stories of his poems to the animals in a circus that were painstakingly trained to entertain the people. Marred by imaginative exhaustion and depleting creativity, the poet faces the desertion of the circus animals. Yet, in actuality, the desertion never takes place. Only the old set of animals give way to the new ones.

The issue of the poet and poetry also finds mention in Yeats’ last poems. The metaphorical implications of the Tower/gyres are mostly associated with Yeats’ endeavour to elucidate Who is a poet and what is poetry? Similarly in Under Ben Bulben, Yeats elucidates the job of a poet and other artists:

Poet and sculptor, do the work,
Nor let the modish painter shirk
Bring the soul of man to God. (SP 206)

In Lapis lazuli, Yeats compares a poet to a builder who is entrusted with the job to bring the soul of man to God as in Under Ben Bulben (SP 205).

Believing that the poet, painter, and musician should do nothing but express themselves (E&I x), Yeats wanted them to use their talent as a medium to express their deepest concerns. Hence an antithetical approach towards both — life in general and his decaying body emerges as the themes of his last poems, so do his philosophical ideas on the
poet in relation to art and posterity. While rejoicing in the pleasures of nature, art, dance and sensuousness, Yeats bemoans the decay in the Irish politics, monarchy, art and the civilization at large. In fact, there is an element of Tragic Joy in the last poems such as Lapis Lazuli wherein he records that art is the way of transcending chaos in the world. Yeats was convinced that art, like religion, had the ability to alleviate human mind and life. Yeats spent his life trying to synthesize his internal contradictions in art with the hope that life would follow art. The inconsistency in his literary achievements and the dwindling poetic output during the later part of his life troubled him with negative thoughts about his capabilities. His ambivalence is apparent from his oft changing stance about his potentiality. At times, contrite and despondent, as a self-critic, he observed that he has reached the bottom of the creative ladder. Now that my ladder’s gone / I must lie down where all the ladders start (SP 202). Related to this revelation is the belief that though poetry repeats old themes, the skilful craftsmanship of the poet recreates and enriches those themes. Parallel to this is also the thought that though the towers and gyres of poetry grow in the poet’s pure mind, they are securely rooted in his surroundings. He also believed that a poet, endowed with a heightened sensibility, perceived the potential of the seemingly ordinary things and themes and metamorphosed them into great poetry.

Enumerating the archetypal source of inspiration for the poets, Yeats lists shared culture, humanity, geographic proximity and folklores as the popular themes of poetry which find expression in poems generation after generation. To these the poets add their own personal touch to bring them to sole test again (SP 193). However, this endeavour is not without a purpose. The poet’s clear intent is to bring man closer to eternity as propounded in Under Ben Bulben where the poet and the sculptor perform this duty. Yeats later poetry also amalgamated the western rationale and the oriental mystical elements and as a result, the poetic vision of these works seems more in sync with the Eastern transcendental religion than the Western culture. His dislike for the values of the modern western world and the modern art is apparent in the last poems. In Under Ben Bulben he makes a rather disparaging comment about modern painting: Nor let the modish painter shirk/ What his great forefathers did (207) and expresses his distaste for modern poetry thus: Scorn the sort now growing up/All out of shape from tip to toe (SP 208).

In a similar vein, modern culture for Yeats is but a mound of refuse as in The Circus Animals’ Desertion. Talking about the ingenuity of a poet or an artist who has in his repository a plethora of sources to derive inspiration from, Yeats lauds their capability in
transforming this heterogeneous matter into meaningful and emotionally satisfying poetic and artistic pieces. In an essay titled "The Moods," he says:

Everything that can be seen, touched, measured, understood, argued over, is to imaginative artist nothing more than a means, for he belongs to the invisible life, and delivers its ever now and ever ancient revelation. (E&I 195)

Likewise Yeats's critical matrix perceived of a poet as often being inspired by mental visions and day dreaming, subconscious fantasies, and prolific imaginative experiences in moments between waking and sleeping. Believing that the symbolic nature of visions and their manifestation in poetry guarantee transcendence of poetry to a much higher level than mere transcription, Yeats found ample precedence for such visions in Blake whom he quotes: "I am drunk with intellectual vision whenever I take a pencil or graver into my hand" (E&I 119). Yeats commended Blake for representing in both poetry and painting "the shapes of beauty, haunting our moments of inspiration: shapes... appearing and reappearing in the minds of artists and poets" (E&I 117). Related to this idea was his faith that the evocation of visions by symbols made for better poetry. He makes a reference to these in an unpublished poem of the 1880s titled "Under the Moon," thus: A song should be/A painted and be-pictured argosy.

Elucidating his poetics through his works, Yeats also exemplifies through them his notion of confining poetry to distinctive geographical regions. In his essay "What is Popular Poetry?" Yeats voices his own concept of poetry as a reflection of one's psyche and environs:

I had a conviction, which indeed I have still, that one's verses should hold, as in a mirror, the colour of one's own climate and scenery in their right proportion. (E&I 5)

A quintessential feature of Yeats's theory of poetics is the locale in the work. He strongly advocated the choice of familiar landscape in the poem to elicit apposite response from the readers. Most of his poems till 1890 were set in or evoked a landscape similar to Oisin, Island of Statues, Innisfree, or Fergus's woods. But he soon realized that such a landscape distanced the poet aesthetically from the reader who might not be familiar with that backdrop. Consequently, he shifted his locale from the strange Arcadia to much familiar Ireland. He was also attracted to it, for he perceived in the familiar landscape of Ireland a symbolic significance which he wished to explore through his works. In 1908, Yeats
When I first wrote, I went here and there for my subjects but presently I convinced myself that I should never go for the scenery of a poem to any country but my own (VP 843-844). Yeats also rejected the irrelevant descriptions of nature (OBMV ix) and emphasized the need to explore the symbolic potential of a milieu. His religion of art has been formulated out of the traditions of stories, comprising imaginary people; inspired by generations of poets, painters and philosophies and his affinity to the scenery of Ireland.

Yeats’ contradictory stance on the kind of poetry he supported is apparent from the fact that although a supporter of pure poetry, in 1895, he arraigned the creators of such a genre for abstracting from all the general purposes of life. He lambasted them for extricating certain images out of context with an aim to beautify their verses but in the process rendering them barren and sterile. Yeats also shifted his focus from the aesthetic and Romantic poets like Spenser, Keats, Coleridge, Rossetti, Dowson to poets such as Arnold, Browning and Tennyson who had a propaganda or traditional doctrine to express. In fact, he praises Goethe, Shakespeare, Wordsworth and Browning for critiquing life honestly. As Yeats evolved as a critic and writer, by the turn of the century he deemed that it was with Goethe and Wordsworth and Browning that poetry gave up the right to consider all things in the world as a dictionary of types, symbols and began to call itself the critic of life and an interpreter of things as they are (E&I 192).

Concomitantly, regarding rhythm as integral to the meaning of the poem, Yeats defined a poem as elaboration of the rhythm of common speech and their association with profound feeling (E&I 508). As stated earlier, to him, time felt in the passage of verse was not chronological time, but time measured in terms of a musical duration. He compared the rhythm to the tickling of a hypnotist’s watch and was certain that only rhythm has the potential to break down barriers, and to bridge the chasm between the writer and the reader, by making the reader suspend or lull his will and open his mind to the writer’s thought process. As such, Yeats recommended the octave verse form as the most apposite form for poetic instinct and experience. In fact, Yeats’ transition from a writer of minor Irish Romantic poetry to that of world poetry was distinctively related to the discovery of an appropriate poetic form and rhythm. Thus while the early Yeats was a poet of quatrains, later he became a poet of octaves, especially of the ottava rima. Apart from this, Yeats also propagated loud articulation of poetry to get its essence. In Literature and the Living Voice, an essay written for The Contemporary Review (October 1906), and included in Plays and Controversies, Yeats affirms that reading poetry aloud could bring it back to the lives of many who have
forgotten its beauty and worth, although he also conceded that it needed changes in its manner to revive it. Yeats was sure that only plain and simple voice could express fairly the diverse structures of one’s thoughts and engage audience attention.

Thus an overview of Yeats’ critical imperative reveals that in the first phase of Yeats’ artistic voyage which lasted up to 1899; there was no definite or established theory of poetry in his critical ideology. Initially, he supported and wrote in a Romantic vein on nature and its bounty in imitation of the Romantics who were his ideals. Later, under the tutelage of the Symbolists, Expressionists and the Impressionists, it was around 1903 that he not only altered the style and content of his poems and plays but also began to reformulate his theories. He believed that the element of strength in poetic language is the common idiom. Besides in place of folklore and mythology which earlier formed the crux of his poetic theory and his creative endeavours, he sought truth behind concrete modern reality and fact through his poetry. He asserted the need to liberate poetry from the age it occurred in and as also from the life of the poet.

Simultaneously, Yeats began to construct an increasingly elaborate mythology of class, in which he formulated his disenchantment with the modern world through ideas of middle class corruption (Howes 8). Holding tradition and personality as vital to his poetics, Yeats juxtaposed them with the deluge of incoherence, vulgarity and triviality which he perceived prevalent in the modern times. However, Yeats also critiqued the middle class values and priorities of the modern world. He also voiced his anti-utilitarian and anti-materialistic stance against this modern corruption which berates the society wherein art, passion, honour, and lofty ideals (VP 291) have no value. Nevertheless, his critical ideology and poetic beliefs also reinforced and re-affirmed his Romantic leanings which continued to underscore much of his literary and critical oeuvre throughout his life.

II

Since Yeats’ development as a poet and a literary critic are inherently connected, his ideology as a critic evolved along with his growth as a poet. He entwined together personal philosophy based on visions and mystical books with that taken out of unwritten traditions to expound the truths and myths of life and to critique other writers especially poets, past and present. Thus unfettered by external pressures or prevalent trends, Yeats exemplified in his own poetry and prose all that he deemed imperative in literature. His concept of the poet and
his social function derived much from Arthur Hallam and Browning’s ideologies. He also illustrated in his studies the poetics and artistic productiveness of the Romantics, and the Symbolists. Nietzsche, Villiers De l'Isle Adam, Rossetti, Maeterlinck, Mallarme and a host of other writers of repute also helped Yeats in devising his critical credo. Yeats displayed similarities with the poetic and philosophical systems of many figures such as Blake, Shelley, Swift, and Walter Pater. He also analysed Irish poets such as Standish James O'Grady and Sir William Ferguson. He not only sought inspiration from these writers but also applied his theory to critique, criticize and comment on them. Here, too, he did not exhibit any definite system or method of choosing works or authors. He either randomly analysed them or interspersed his prose with allusions to their works to substantiate and augment his claims. In fact, he has been often accused of applying rather queer and whimsical beliefs to choose writers or their works for critical scrutiny. For instance, he analysed Shakespeare as the writer of Richard II rather than Othello; Ibsen as the poet of Peer Gynt and not as a psychologist of Hedda Gabler; Balzac for certain spiritual revelations; and Flaubert as the writer of beautiful words (Pierce I 217). His evaluation of other poets and writers was driven by his own whims and fancies, with little care for rationalizing choices or judging their popularity or craft. Consequently, many a times, he judged the worth of poets and authors on the basis of their minor works rather than their masterpieces.

Within his critical milieu, Yeats commented on and critiqued motley of poets belonging to varied ages and movements of literature and imbibed into his poetics and poetry their ideologies and notions. The present study undertakes to take up Yeats’s estimation of some of the chief exponents of various movements and ages with whom Yeats was either associated, and as also the poet whom he critiqued or emulated. An avid reader, Yeats read the Greek and Latin Classics quite early in his life and was enamoured by the quality and depth of the Latin verses. He especially admired the rapidity and progression of thought in Homer and his propensity for aptness of oral delivery of poetry. Yeats’s interest in Celtic voyages and sea tales was also ignited by his early exposure to the writers like Homer and Virgil. Similarly, the influence of Virgil is discernible in his own promising poetic strength and his interest in the larger rhythms of human destiny, are that of Virgil and exhibit the latter’s influence on him.

Nevertheless, while the fragmentary accounts of critiques of various writers and poets occur strewn across Yeats’s innumerable writings, assessment of the Romantics formed one of the most sustained and engaging concerns of Yeats’s poetics. Apparently, Yeatsian literary
Romanticism had never been confined to a particular epoch or age. Though he recognized Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats as the exponents of Romanticism, he also considered them a part of the poetic tradition of Dante and Spenser.

Introduced to Blake by his father, Yeats continued to hold the former in high esteem for the rest of his life. He emulated and replicated Blake’s vision in his own poetry and poetic thought. Both had faith in the religion of imagination, and believed all religions to be one. Thus if Blake calls the British nation to live the life of the imagination and the vision in which everything that lives is holy (Golgonooza 6), Yeats follows with Everything we look up is blessed (CP 267). Yeats’ observations in the essays William Blake and the Imagination and William Blake and his Illustrations to The Divine Comedy are the most profound and expository accounts of Blake’s literary fecundity. The two also shared a fetish for contraries and opposites such as youth and age, light and dark, hell and Heaven, love and hate, good and evil and attraction and repulsion as a protean concept. Blake’s belief that opposites energize the universe was adopted by Yeats to develop his personal gyre system. Yeats used these archetypal images most successfully in A Vision wherein he states: All the gains of man come from conflict with the opposite of true being (AV 13). Yeats was also appreciative of the distinction drawn by Blake between the objective poet and the subjective poet. Besides he regarded Blake’s essay on Shelley as amongst the most philosophical fundamental and radical works of Modern English criticism (UP I 277).

Kathleen Raine believes that Blake cast one of the most lasting and enduring influences which formed Yeats’ imaginative, intellectual and spiritual life (Initiate 82). Ideologically, both were poles apart. Yeats, a dreamer was disdainful of Christianity while the visionary Blake, firm and assertive in his demeanour, was a firm believer in the omnipotence of God, authority of Bible and divinity of mankind. Yet both shared a common interest in mysticism and what lies beyond the visible world. They followed, with great enthusiasm, the Platonic and the neo-platonic traditions, and the Hermetic and Gnostic teachings. What drew Yeats to Blake most was the latter’s total repudiation of scientific and materialistic values of his time. If Blake relied upon the ancient literature, philosophy and theosophy to formulate his own system of values; Yeats, too, was fascinated by the Gaelic and ancient philosophy and folktales. Both questioned the tenets of western materialism and challenged the prevalent scientific premises.

Correspondingly, Yeats’ concept of consciousness as conflict seems inspired by Blake and is an extension of Blake’s observation made in plate 3 of The Marriage of Heaven
and Hell wherein he declares opposition is true friendship and without contraries is no progression. Attraction and repulsion, reason and energy, love and hate are necessary to human existence (MHH n.pag.). Yeats replicates similar ideas in Anima Mundi section of Mythologies, where he asserts Without contrary vision, there can be no happiness and further elaborates:

I think all happiness depends on the energy to assume the mask of some other life, on a re-birth as something not one's self (My 334)

Inheriting directly from Blake, Yeats conceptualized imagination in terms of a mystical concept, wherein the personal imagination manifests as a part of the divine mind. However, both of them failed to synthesize the tension of conflict in their craft. Nevertheless, Yeats assimilated into his writings various images, symbols, ideas and figures from Blake, Yeats seems to agree with Blake's whose character Los in Jerusalem: the Emanation of the Giant Albion says: we must create a system or be enslaved by another man; I will not reason and compare: my business is to create (Wikipedia). Just as Blake perceived knowledge to be inseparable from the knower, Yeats echoes similar views hundred years later when Yeats questions in Among School Children. How can we know the dancer from the dance? (SP130). Thus both of them recognized the primacy of creative energy as characterized by unity, wholeness and holism.

In A Vision, Yeats conceded that his mind had been full of Blake from boyhood up and [he] saw the world as a conflict - Spectre and Emanation- and could distinguish between a contrary and a negation (72). Parallel to Blake's contrary Vision, Yeats devised his doctrine of the Mask. Both shared an analogous vision of apocalypse. In Yeats and Romantics, George Bornstein observes that Blake saw physical nature as antagonistic to imagination, always ready to leave it astray. Great things depend on the spiritual and not on the Natural world and recalls Blake speaking longingly of leaving the delusive Goddess nature (25). Akin to this were Yeats' views which not only propounded the antimonies that exist between Art and Nature but also saw Nature as the adversary of imagination. Like other Romantics such as Coleridge and Keats, Yeats used many mystical figures and nature in his poetry. To him, as it did to the most Romantics, Nature did not merely present a beautiful landscape; it was a bountiful source of values like happiness, serenity, liberty and spiritual beauty wrought by spiritual forces. However, unlike the pantheism advocated by
Wordsworth, both Blake and Yeats did not call for escape into the world of nature to ward off the fret and fume of the human world. A devoted disciple of Blake, Yeats gave a new and vital incarnation to the fundamental ideas of Blake, and expounded the wisdom and visionary philosophy of Blake, a metaphysician who used poetry as the language of spiritual knowledge. Fascinated by the mystical inclination of Blake, Yeats credited him for his own sustained interest in mysticism. In *A Vision*, Yeats observes:

Arguments with my father had destroyed my confidence and driven me from speculation to the direct experience of the mystics. I had once known Blake as thoroughly as his unfinished confused Prophetic books permitted and I had read Swedenborg and Boehme, and my initiation into the *Hermetic Studies* had filled my heart with Cabbalistic imagery. (*AV* 12)

However, Yeats’s analysis of the poetic acumen of the poets of the past was not confined only to those who formed an integral part of his critical and ideological philosophy. Many other Romantics drew his attention for varied reasons and he was not always appreciative of their talent and accomplishments. For instance, Yeats did not regard Wordsworth as a significant poet of the English Romantic Revival and decried his use of nature as a tool to moralize. He justified his stance by arguing that lack of faith in his imagination, immoderation of descriptive nature and his own vision, led to Wordsworth’s failure. In one of his letters, he records his assessment of Wordsworth:

I have just started to read through the whole seven volumes of Wordsworth in *Dowden’s edition*. He strikes me as always destroying his poetic experience by his reflective power. His intellect was common place and unfortunately, he has been taught to respect nothing else. He thinks of his poetical experience not as incomparable in itself but as an engine that maybe yoked to his intellect. He is full of a sort of utilitarianism and that is perhaps the reason why in later life he is continually looking back upon a lost vision, a lost happiness. (*L* 590)

A source of much of Yeats’s philosophical and mystical ideas and the concept of Symbolization was S. T. Coleridge. Yeats is believed to have re-crystallized the images of Romanticism through his study, interpretation and even misinterpretations of Coleridge’s ideology. Yeats’s image of Coleridge was incongruous. While impressed and fascinated by
Coleridge's study and interest in Mysticism and Symbolism, he did not approve of him as a lake poet as a cohort of Wordsworth or an exponent of simple and colloquial expressions. However, he turned to Coleridge for resolutions to the questions posed by the abstractions of the neo-Platonism and found answers (Gibson 4).

With Shelley, Yeats shared a problematic relationship. Initially, profoundly influenced by him, he believed the former to be a mystic whose creative system offered hope for humanity. Perceiving an ideology similar to his youthful self, his critique of Shelley's vision was an extension of his own mask and the notion of poetic function. In his essay The Philosophy of Shelley Poetry, Yeats claimed: the [Shelley] has certainly experience of all the most profound of the mystical states (E&I 79). He was fascinated by Shelley's revolutionary ardour and his faith that poets are the true legislators of the world. Yeats' concept of the social purpose of a poet and the social value of poetry as essentially private was also motivated by his reading of Shelley's poetry. Likewise he agreed with Shelley that Language, colour, form, and religious and civic habits of actions are all the instruments and materials of poetry (E&I 67). He greatly admired the rootless fantasy of Shelley's verses although, unlike Blake, he was not so impressed with Queen Mab. Shelley's poetry, nevertheless, opened up new vistas for him. He also extolled Prometheus Unbound as a sacred text-an allegory of how man can recapture his soul from the fetters of external elements and eulogized it thus:

I think this mysterious song utters a faith as simplified as simple and as ancient as those [Irish] country people, in a form suited to a new age. (77-78)

Since Shelley was well-versed with Gaelic folklores, Yeats was convinced that the former shared our curiosities, our political problems, our conviction that, despite all experience to the contrary, love is enough; and unlike Blake, isolated by an arbitrary symbolism, he seemed to sum up all that was metaphysical in English poetry (E&I 424). Two things which Yeats really admired in Shelley was his revulsion for materialism and his idealistic devotion to the search for Intellectual Beauty. In The Philosophy of Shelley Poetry, Yeats explores his notion of Intellectual Beauty and the recurrent symbols such as the moon, the sun, the rivers, the evening star and the tower and subsequently evolved an analogous web of images in his own poetry (Bornstein 22). Impressed with his craft, Yeats
gave a place to Shelley in the same Phase XVIII in *A Vision* as himself where Unity of Being was possible.

However, Yeats's stand on Shelley was inconsistent. Gradually, he had begun to find fault with the latter as a poet, a revolutionary and a man. In his estimation, from being a mystic, pointing the way to the ultimate truth, Shelley's stature was reduced to that of a mere poet who could attain the desirable Unity of Being only partially and a poet who was rather too optimistic about the future of mankind. Yeats came to believe about Shelley thus: "He lacked the vision of Evil, could not conceive of the world as a continuous conflict (qtd. in Langbaum 580). True to his ambivalent self, clubbing Shelley with the likes of Shakespeare and Milton, he extolled him earlier as an isolated poet who rejected the vulgar world but was quick to censure him for his inability to fuse together reality and justice, for lacking a vision of the evil and for his acquiescence in propagandist emotions. Contradicting himself again, Yeats reviewed his earlier opinion about Shelley's contribution in devising his own poetics and conceded that his own poetry was too full of the reds and yellows Shelley gathered in Italy (*E&I* 5).

This realization was further strengthened by Yeats's participation in the political turmoil in Ireland and the challenges he faced at the Abbey Theatre — events which urged him to restructure his early self. Consequently, he began to question Shelley's ideology which not long ago he eulogized. Thus in his essay *Prometheus Unbound* (1932), Yeats declared "Shelley was not a mystic, his system of thought was constructed by his logical faculty to satisfy desire, not a symbolic revelation received after the suspension of all desire (421-2). Yeats also indicted Shelley as a political revolutionary, scared of the whole drama of life who expected miracle, the Kingdom of God in the twinkling of an eye was afraid of the Last Day like a Victorian child (419-23). Thus true to his dialectical self, Yeats's perception of Shelley changed drastically as did his ideas about the universe and the poet's poetic function and role in that universe.

Another crucial figure in Yeats's poetic life is Nietzsche. Although Nietzsche was not a poet, yet Yeats shared a profound kinship of spirit and perception of life with the former. Yeats's personal poetics and the philosophical pantheon drew from Nietzsche whom he considered a strong enchanter, belonging to that rich tradition of writers whom he constantly tried to emulate or align with. In a letter to Lady Gregory, Yeats wrote in 1902:
Nietzsche completes Blake and has the same roots. I have not read anything with so much excitement since I got to love Morris's stories which have the same curious astringent joy. (L 379)

Yeats's idea of tragedy and the Dionysian formula of tragic joy was also a take from Nietzsche's similar concepts. Both rejected the real world and its vulgar democratic ideals. Unlike Aristotle who advocated the catharsis or purgation of emotions through pity and fear, Nietzsche and Yeats promoted exultation in the midst of crisis and terror. Even the concept of Yeats's Masks is influenced by Nietzsche's view of Apollo as the divine image of the individual self, and his view of the superman as totally subjective man. Nietzsche's theory of two cultural modes also found favour with Yeats for its similarity with his theory of historical cycles of growth and destruction that figured in many of his poems and A Vision.

Concurrently, Pre-Raphaelitism found prominence in Yeats's correspondence and essays of the 1880s and 1890s. In fact, he credited this school with shaping his early critical and poetic ideology. He had learned to think in the midst of the last phase of the Pre-Raphaelitism (E&I 346). Although not a slavish follower of this movement, in the beginning of his literary career, he admired and emulated the autumnal languor of their world, their decorative technique, their dictum of the return to nature. The colours, rhythm and patterns of Pre-Raphaelite paintings fascinated him and urged him to establish parallels between their art and literature. He longed he recalled, for pattern, for Pre-Raphaelitism, for an art allied to poetry (Au 81). In this context, Elizabeth Loizeaux avers:

The visual arts of the Pre-Raphaelites supplied Yeats with rationales for renouncing his father, for identifying friends, and for judging other artists. Selecting certain Pre-Raphaelites for admiration, leaving others aside, examining the works he loved, and identifying their strengths and weaknesses became, more importantly, a method of determining his own poetic course. As a psychological manoeuvre, it provided Yeats the necessary distance to give and take self-criticism, and much of his analysis of other writers has been correctly read as commentary on his own poetic position. (Loizeaux 6)

In fact, Yeats's initial attempts at painting and poetry of vision were characteristically reminiscent of the early Pre-Raphaelite paintings. He even viewed Blake through the prism of
this school, admiring him most when he showed definitive inclination towards Pre-Raphaelitism. In his critical writings, Yeats elucidates his profound attraction towards Rossetti’s craft and his adaptation of simplicity and stateliness of Morris’s late verse. Elizabeth Bergmann Loizeaux quite appropriately comments on the situation:

With little regard for the Pre-Raphaelites’ announced realism, their Victorian obsession with detail, or the didacticism of many of their paintings, Yeats and other late century admirers followed William Morris and Edward Burnes-Jones in focusing on the Pre-Raphaelites as exponents of the ideal in art. They saw that it transported viewers far from the ugliness of modern life. The Pre-Raphaelite revolution thus came to signify the triumph of spirit and imagination over the materialism of Victorian life. (Loizeaux 12-13)

William Morris, a poet, craftsman and a social critic encouraged Yeats in his formative years to write and stirred his interest in literature further. In his essay “Four Years,” Yeats recorded: “I took to him first because of some little tricks of speech and body that reminded me of my old grandfather in Sligo but soon discovered his spontaneity and joy that made him my chief of men. Today, I do not rate his poetry very high, but for an odd altogether wonderful time or thought, and yet if some angel offered me the choice, I would choose his life, poetry and all, rather than my own or any other man’s (archive ix). Both displayed the late-Romantic tendency which gave more prominence to the picturesque and the dreamy, imaginative aspect of poetry rather than the intense and the dramatic. In Morris, Yeats found an anachronistic representative of the poetry of things, related by opposition to Rossetti and Shelley who represented disembodied poetry.

In Literature and The Living Voice, Yeats says: “Modern Literature, above all poetical literature, is monotonous in its structure and effeminate in its continual insistence upon certain moments of stained lyricism (CW VIII 107). Yeats found definite literary connections between William Morris, who did more than any modern to recover medieval art, and the Romantic poets:

The movement most characteristic of the literature and art, and to some extent of the thoughts, too, of our century has been romanticism. It marked the regained freedom of the spirit and imagination of man in literature. Since then, painting in its turn has
flung aside the old conventions. The arts of decoration are now [1890] making the same struggle. They have been making it for some years under the leadership of William Morris. (UP I 183)

Calling Morris "perfectly happy and fortunate poet of modern times, Yeats regarded Morris a visionary of the natural world (E&I 54). He commended him for achieving integration and wholeness in his poetry in which natural abundance and natural goodness emerged as governing and unifying elements. In fact, the prose romances of Morris had a greater influence on Yeats than his poetry. Nevertheless, Yeats censured the poetry of Morris on the plea that since he understood "nothing of the intellectual suffering, as a result he lacked passion leading to monotony in his poems." (Au 95).

Incontestibly, Yeats' evolution as a critic and a visionary poet brought about a change in his outlook and perception towards Pre-Raphaelitism. His dissatisfaction with this school had reached a point by the end of 1890s when he began to question his own estimation and the true essence of Pre-Raphaelitism which he had been so greatly admiring and emulating as also the worth of his own poetry based on it. He realized that their art, as did his own based on Pre-Raphaelitism, was far removed from life and reality. In fact, recording distance from life as the major flaw of the Pre-Raphaelite aesthetics, he decided to break free from its influence.

Primarily a product of Victorianism, Yeats, in fact, came of age poetically during the Victorian age. As such despite his avowals to the contrary, he could not have remained immune to the developments of the epoch. Most of his creative works, according to Richard Fallis, is "full of trans-valued Victorianisms; his critical method was Victorian, and yet his sensibility and intellect were modern in a way Tennyson and even Browning were not" (100). However, Yeats voraciously opposed the Victorian tenets in poetry. Under the tutelage of his mentor-father John Yeats, he denounced Victorian writers and especially the poets on the pretext that they "filled their work with impurities, curiosities about politics, about science, about history, about religion (Au 102). He explained the popular reaction of the poets against Victorianism in the introduction to The Oxford Book of Modern Verse:

The revolt against Victorianism meant to the young poet a revolt against irrelevant descriptions of nature, the scientific and moral discursiveness of In Memoriam...the
political eloquence of Swinburne, the psychological curiosity of Browning, and the poetical diction of everybody. (OBMV ix)

In his seminal essay Yeats and the Representation of Victorian poetry, Richard Fallis observes that for Yeats, obsessed with the business of making unities; neither detachable ideas nor fragmentary beauty could be enough. But disunity and fragmentation were, he realized, essential hallmarks of Victorian middle-class culture. By attempting to speak to their age and class, most of the Victorians had simply compounded the imaginative crisis in which they found themselves. The demands of their audience, coupled with their own fears of the implications of visionary Romanticism had led many of the Victorians to the creation of popular poetry disassociated, artificial and dishonest in its perception and expressions (92).

Passionately critical of the Victorians’ penchant for rationality and externality rather than revelation and inspiration, in his essay The Autumn of Body (1897), Yeats observes that poetry, having tried to embrace science, politics, and all human affairs in the generation of Tennyson and Browning, was now working towards relinquishment and intensification; the new poetry would be keener, more disembodied, than the old (Albright 452). This change in form and content of poetry is in fact discernible in his own poetry published two years later in a volume The Wind among the Reeds. Thus though Yeats admired some of Tennyson’s lyrics such as Akbar’s Dream, Telemachus, The Wanderer and The Silent Voices, he dismissed as insignificant some of the longer poems such as The Idylls of the King or In Memoriam, despite their popularity among the British middle-class Victorians. He was especially critical of In Memoriam, deeming it devoid of subjectivity and emotions such as personal loss, longing, broken-heartedness and the final reconciliation with grief. Hostile to Tennyson’s attempt at moralizing through the poem, Yeats censured him for lacking aesthetics and sincerity in both language and expression. One can admire Tennyson, he asserted, but one cannot read him because he was that sterile paradox and an abstract poet (qtd. in Aldington 57). Similarly, Harold Bloom considers Yeats’ attitude towards Tennyson intensification of the Pre-Raphaelite resurgence of Victorian Romanticism (Yeats 25). True to his contradictory critical stance, on one hand, Yeats lauded Tennyson for his marvellous picturesque power, but, on the other hand, derided him as a limited visionary whose fine poetic imagination had been corrupted by the demands of its audience. He also senses a sort of emotional and intellectual fraudulence in Tennyson’s
poetry. Escapist in nature, Tennyson’s poetry, according to Yeats, was a means to flee from reality and vision in both expression and perception. In a notebook of April 7, 1921, (National Library of Ireland, No. 13,576) Yeats observes that Tennyson’s poetry is the equivalent of 19th century academic painting.

Besides a troubled childhood bereft of self-esteem, Yeats shared with Browning a parallel interest in the occult, appropriately supported by their respective wives who were themselves interested in the mystical world of magic. Both of them also depicted an undeniable influence of Shelley and Landour on their literary creativity. Browning’s influence on Yeats began quite early in his life. Yeats recalled carrying to the art schools some knowledge of English poetry especially of Browning who had begun to move by his air of wisdom (Au 49). Yeats especially mentions Browning’s distinction between subjective poet and objective poet in his essay on Shelley.

Adhering to self-imposed objectivity through external dramatization in his poetry, Browning had tried to disassociate the poet from his emotions by projecting them on to the external persona. However, Yeats who regarded Shelley, Browning and himself as subjective poets disagreed with Browning and considered his concept of dissociation of the poet as a violation of his basic nature. Yeats reproached Browning for limiting his imagination to its psychological correlatives in the world and for pretending to be God’s spy and for using his dramatic personas as mouthpieces to explicate what he could not say in his own voice. Yeats considered Browning, like Tennyson and Arnold, an artist fragmented by his attempts at denial of subjectivity and consequently accused him of double deception of both - the audience and the creator himself. Noticeably, Yeats was not steadfast in his appraisal of Browning. From shielding him in 1890 with the claim that thought and speculation were to Browning means of dramatic expression much more than aims in themselves (LNI 97-98) and appreciative of getting up a Browning celebration (L 565); he later denounced his association with Browning as a dangerous association (qtd. in Hones 437). Yeats also accused Browning of using verse as a vehicle of opinion. In fact, in 1887, Yeats recorded: I have not been reading Browning this long while (L 49) and by 1912, he concedes, I have turned from Browning- to me a dangerous influence- to Morris (L 759).

Similarly, though Yeats does not talk much about Mathew Arnold’s craft, he regarded him as a naturalist and a moralist scholar - poet, endowed with a sharp critical imagination. Ideologically, Yeats had serious differences with Arnold. He was particularly dismissive of
the latter’s critical imperative of poetry as the critic of life and did not agree with Arnold’s assessment of Wordsworth as a high Romantic nor did he approve of Arnold’s description of Shelley as a beautiful and ineffectual angel, beating in the void his luminous wings in vain (Shelley 380). Similarly, he did not agree with Arnold’s observations on Keats’ letters as being love letters of a surgeon’s apprentice (102-4) or even that of Coleridge as a poet and philosopher wretched in the mist of opium (Arnold html). Since Victorianism as a literary movement, especially in the genre of poetry, did not hold much interest for Yeats, consequently, he was dismissive of many Victorians such as Oscar Wilde, Wilfred Blunt and Lionel Johnson whom he regarded minor achievers struggling to assert their personality against the impersonality of Victorianism. In Swinburne, Yeats perceived an incorporation of all the ills and inadequacies of Victorianism. In one of his letters, Yeats decries Swinburne’s personal poems as having the sincerity of a Times Leader (L 649) and suggested that his later works were as abstract as a cubist painting (649). Similarly though Yeats valued the critical power of Wilde, he dismissed him as an insignificant poet.

Thus assessing poetry in the tradition of the Romantics, Yeats regarded Blake and Shelley the yardsticks against whom he gauged the worth of other poets. Richard Fallis posits that in Yeats’ views some of the greatest names in Victorian Poetry were frightened deviants from this tradition and throughout his quarrels with Victorianism runs the theme that poetry of vision is the norm against which all Post-Romantics should be judged (Fallis 89). Yeats had conceived of the concept of poetry of vision during the long process of composing The Wandering of Oisin (1889) which he defined as the intense realization of a state of ecstatic emotion symbolized in a definite imagined region (L 583). In this regard, he offered Keats as the apt symbol of one who wrote out of the impression made by the world upon their delicate senses (E&I 347). Nevertheless, despite all the bickering and quarrels with the Victorians, Yeats owed much to his association with them. With Tennyson, he has in common an interest in beauty, themes of immortal longing and eternal vacation from reality and in Hallam’s concept of sensation, apart from a similar theory which differentiates between the actual life and the artistic life and between the rational and emotional apprehension of truth.

The poetics, aesthetics and critical achievements of Yeats showed definite imprint of Walter Pater, one of the exponents of the pre-moderns. His contribution to Yeats’ oeuvre becomes significant because Pater emerged on the literary scene as a link between the
nineteenth century and the twentieth century. Bloom believes that Pater is half way between Wordsworth and our selves (qtd. in Bizot 389). Yeats adopted from Pater the deductive principle for his insightful assessment of authors and poets. Yeats uses many Paterian rhythms, phrases and images as part of his methodised aesthetics in his poetry and prose. In fact, Yeats' Introduction to Oxford Book of Modern Verse carries the greatest tribute to Pater. The fact that the former chose Pater's Mona Lisa passage from The Renaissance to open The Oxford Book of Modern Verse indicates Pater's continuous hold over Yeats' artistic consciousness. He justified the use by claiming that Pater had entire uncritical admiration of his generation and that the passage dominated a generation (OBMV xiii). Yeats acknowledged Pater's authority on poets during the nineties; when the conclusion to The Renaissance had dominated the literary scene. However, the Leonardo Essays seemed to impress Yeats more than the conclusion and remained a perpetual influence on Yeats.

Categorically rejecting rhetoric as superfluous and undesirable for poetry, Yeats derided the Victorian rhetorical tradition. He even censured Dante Gabriel Rossetti for using poetry as a tool to reform or to judge and punish (E&I 129). However, later he revised his opinion about Dante and credited him for waging a war not only within but also with the outside world. In Mythology, Yeats records: Unlike those of the great poets who are at peace with the world and at war with themselves, he fought a double war (My 330). Milton and Sir Joshua Reynolds were likewise clubbed with Dante as pagan philosophers whose poetics was governed by an urge to convince, to reform, to judge and to punish.

Amongst the Oriental poets, Yeats had special affection for Rabindranath Tagore. In a conversation with Pound, he had extolled Tagore as someone greater than any of us. Apart from his poetry, Yeats is believed to have read and admired the latter's critiques on the West, including those on colonization of India. In this context, Patrick Colm Hogan avers: Yeats extrapolated his personal connection and admiration of India and the Orient onto Tagore (255). He found in Tagore's Geetanjali, a reflection of some of his own mysticism and symbolism, based on various myths and legends. Analogous to Yeats' poetry which echoed the concerns and folklores of Ireland, Tagore's poetry and songs epitomized Indian literature and culture:
Mr. Tagore, like the Indian civilization itself, has been content to discover the soul and surrender himself to its spontaneity. (Yeats, 1916, xx)

Inspired by the poetics of Tagore, Yeats wrote the introduction to Geetanjali, and recognized Tagore’s heightened sensibility as an essential racial and cultural trait and not merely a concept or tradition. Yeats also regarded him an epitome of spiritual power and strength, attained through the study of holy books and scriptures. Conversely, Tagore eulogized Yeats in an article published in Prabhasi (1912) and later in the American Review of Reviews, (1914):

Yeats revealed the soul of Ireland through the individual soul. He sees this world not with his eyes; he embraces this world not with his intellect; but he does both with his life and soul. This world, to him, is not a world crowded with animate and inanimate objects. In the objective world he recognizes the perennial presence of a powerful providence. (102)

Their mutual admiration is quite apparent. Thus if in Tagore, Yeats found a model for an Irish past, Tagore found in Yeats, a similitude of the passion for an independent futuristic nation. Romantic by nature, both of them were also idealists and mystics who believed in the theory of re-incarnation, and were in a way "voices in each other's dreams."

Thus though occidental in origin, Yeats' poetics and philosophy had definitive oriental traces imbibed from his study of the oriental literature and scriptures. The idea that "East embodies an unbroken mind" is central to Yeats' aesthetics and understanding of the orient. Yeats is convinced that the European society lacks the spontaneity and the sensibility of the "logical" and "boundless" philosophy of the East (Au 56), which he found most profoundly manifested in their poetry. He discovered in the oriental literature a wealth of images and ideas, akin to his own mysticism for modern Europe. "I have fed upon the philosophy of the Upanishads all my life," he told A.C. Bose in 1937. The romantic appeal of India and its spiritualism fascinated Yeats not only because of his inclination towards mysticism but also because he found a certain similarity between India and ancient Ireland. Both came from cultures that had a long tradition of romance and long history of folk legends and folk art. To Yeats, a parallel sense of "unity of life" which he envisioned for Ireland seemed exemplified in Tagore's Geetanjali. In his introduction to this anthology, Yeats remarks on this quality:
These lyrics display in their thought a world I have dreamed of all my life long. The work of a supreme culture. A tradition, where poetry and religion are the same thing, has passed through centuries, gathering from learned and unlearned metaphor and emotion, and carried back again to the multitude the thought of the scholar and the noble. (ebook n. Pg.)

Apart from this, Yeats’ assertion in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*: “We make out of the quarrels with others rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves poetry” (My 331) redefined the theory of poetry. In a way, it carried forward Mallarme’s concept of poetry being a matter of words and not ideas and the Romantic tenet which regarded poetry as the spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions. In Yeats’ opinion, quarrel with the world is not a fit subject for genuine poetry. For the same reason, he found fault with Irish poetry. He felt that the Irish poets in their over enthusiasm to serve the nationalistic cause tried to sway the minds of the audience by depicting the plight and the suffering of the people and consequently could not have a lasting impact on the readers. He found the Irish obsession with oratory and the practice of eulogizing Irish virtue and denigrating English morality rather utilitarian in a narrow sense and detrimental to the national cause. Yeats protested against such a utilitarian young Irish mentality which overlooked the internal conflict within the soul in favour of the discord with the outside world. In his review of Charles Gavan Duffy’s *A Short Life of Thomas Davis*, Yeats wrote: “Let us sing our political song with ardour, shouldering our pikes while we sing if we so minded, but do not let us always call them great poetry” (UP I 408). Akin to this principle, was his belief that though philosophy or moral ideas cannot be separated from poetry, the poet should not be affiliated with a political ideology or moral dogma if he has to prove his worth and save himself from becoming rhetorical and predisposed. Yeats even suggested ways to escape from the temptation of writing about one’s quarrel with others. In *Autobiography*, he says: “Personal utterance, which had almost ceased in English Literature, could be as fine an escape from rhetoric and abstraction as drama itself” (Au 102).

From late Romanticism, as Yeats stepped into a period of early literary Modernism, he made acquaintances with certain writers who transformed his ideology further. Ezra Pound, his protégé and a much younger poet, introduced him to Modernism. Yeats’ growing preference for directness of expression, plain speech, and sparse language to explore the complexity and mysteries of life and mind was an outcome of his association with Pound and
is indicative of his initiation from Romanticism into Modernism. While the Modernists were engaged in making the poetic language and diction complex, convoluted and difficult, by experimenting with its form, content and context, Yeats struggled to come to terms with this momentous break from the traditional forms and genres.

In the modern literary milieu, the pervasive influence of two of the foremost poets of the twentieth century - Yeats and T.S Eliot cannot be negated. As contemporaries, they influenced, contradicted and affected each other. An overview of their public writings enlightens us on the correlation between the two writers. Though Yeats had been consistent in his opinion about Eliot, the latter reviewed and revised his assessment of Yeats as a writer and a public figure. Eliot’s initial reaction towards Yeats was that of disparage and distaste towards the latter’s poetic style and his association with the Theosophical Society. However, after the screening of The Hawk’s Well in 1916 and the publication of The Wild Swan at Coole in 1919, Eliot extolled Yeats’s mythical method in his review of Ulysses, declaring him the greatest poet of his time (Eliot, Commentary 612). Yeats’s assessment of Eliot is aptly summarized by his son Michael Butler Yeats, in an essay on his father’s relationship with Eliot wherein he commented:

From the first, he disliked the poetry of Eliot, it was, he claimed grey, cold, flat, and bare. In time he came to accept Eliot as a major poet, and he commented in particular on his great influence on the young. But on Eliot as a person, he seems to have had nothing to say. (170)

Moreover, Yeats’s attitude towards the Eliot Ezra Auden School was ambivalent. While editing for The Oxford Book of Modern Verse, Yeats was besieged by a dilemma over his response to the modern poetry in general and these three in particular. In a letter to Olivia Shakespear, he records:

I can never do any kind of work (apart from verse) unless I have a clear problem to solve. My problem this time will be: How far do I like the Ezra, Eliot, Auden School and if I do not, why not? Then this further problem Why do the young generation like it so much? What do they see or hope? I am to write a long introduction (Wade 833).
Critical of Eliot’s “mechanics of Verse,” Yeats posited in *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* that Eliot’s works are “works without apparent imagination, producing his effects by a reaction of all rhythms and metaphors used by the more popular Romantics rather than the discovery of his own, this rejection giving his work an exaggerated plainness that has the effect of novelty” (*OBMV* xxi). He compared Eliot’s poetry to Manet’s paintings finding both of them rather dry, cold and grey and further censured Eliot for his rhythmical flatness and deficiency in pleasure.

Inversely, Ezra Pound and Yeats shared a great camaraderie despite their obvious differences. Pound had been Yeats’ secretary at Stone College in Sussex for three consecutive winter seasons from 1913-1916. Initially he had been in awe of Yeats. In the Yale collections of letters written to Isabel Pound on January 1, 1910, he calls Yeats “the greatest living poets whose work has more than a most temporary interest.” However, both Yeats and Pound benefitted from their long association. Yeats contributed much to Pound’s Modernism and his art of versification, persuading him to eventually give up the use of archaic expressions and inverted syntax. Conversely, Pound suggested Yeats to weed out abstractions from his repertoire. In fact, Yeats credited Pound for teaching him to use natural and dramatic speech which could make the hearer feel the “presence of a man thinking and feeling” (Ellmann 214). Pound advocated Yeats to “be clear and precise,” “eliminate all abstractions and all words which sense did not justify as well as sound” and insisted that all images be rendered “hard and concrete” in order to refine his poetry.

In “A Packet for Ezra Pound,” Yeats observed about Pound that he was a man “whose art is opposed to that of mine, whose criticism commends what I most condemn, a man with whom I should quarrel more than with anyone else if we were not united by affection” (*AV* 3). Though widely believed to have improved Yeats’ poetic style of later poetry, Pound was not always appreciative of Yeats’ works. In his analysis of *The Wind among the Reeds*, he calls Yeats “faded” and terms the lyrics of *The King of the Great Clock Tower* “putrid.” Similarly, Yeats too showed reluctant appreciation of *Cantos*. To him, Pound’s poetics seems to suffer from “that lack of form or consequent obscurity which is the main defect of Auden, Day Lewis, and their school” (*OBMV* xxiv). Yet they remained bound to one another by affection and the tension of fruitful disagreement (Parkinson 256).

Pound and Yeats also exchanged ideas on the aesthetics of versification and endeavoured to synthesize a new poetic form for the latter which incorporated both the
modernist stance and the traditional modes. Pound also gave force and direction to certain tendencies in Yeats' craft. He helped him in formulating his theory of Masks and introduced him to the Japanese Noh plays which Yeats used to achieve a distinct aloofness in his plays. Pound was a dynamic modern who campaigned for the direct, empirical approach in literature. He had no patience for mysticism or the rhetorical excesses of the Romantics although he drew inspiration from the classic writers such as Ovid, Homer, the French Troubadours, Gautier and Confucius. Yeats, on the contrary, was an "aging Romantic" overtly dependent on Gaelic folklore and mysticism and influenced by the French symbolists. Both, however, were associated with the poets of Rhymers Club and the French symbolists. Thus though divergent in poetic sensibilities, they shared a strong literary relationship.

Yeats' relation with W H Auden was also marked with ambivalence. Both shared with Eliot a common concern for civilization although Auden's vision seemed most skeptical of all. Though heirs to Romanticism and Symbolism, their approach was antithetical to one another. While Yeats focused on assimilation of elements, Auden was more prone to investigation and analysis. Similarly, if Auden abhorred Yeats' political agenda, Yeats was equally dismissive of the Modernist school of which Auden was an exponent. He censured them for "that lack of form and consequent obscurity which is the main defect of Auden, Day Lewis and their school" (OBMV xxv-vi). In his anthology, Yeats had included poems belonging to that part of Auden's career when he was emerging as a promising new voice of the modernist literature.

An analysis of Yeats' views and opinions on varied poets and their poetics brings forth the underlying tenet of his own critical canon which does not stick to any particular method, system or preference for a genre, form or content. His multifariousness as a literary figure is discernible in his polemical writings as well. His critique of other poets and writers is based primarily on his own assumptions which he endeavoured to put across through illustrations, anecdotal accounts and befitting examples from literature and life wherever needed. Thus despite the ambivalence and incongruity in his critical writings, Yeats comes across as an astute critic with assorted poetic beliefs against which he measured the worth of innumerable writers, especially poets although only a handful have been taken up in this study due to paucity of space and the vastness of Yeats' critical oeuvre.
Apart from the characteristic fragmentary analysis of poets and their poetry in articles, essays and prose works, Yeats expounds his opinion and selection of what he termed the best of the works of the poets of English language in an anthology titled *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*. It presents the neo-Romantic critique of the modern poetry, traces of which is also perceptible in Yeats' own poetry. An anthology of contemporary poetry, it served two purposes: one, to expound the concept of poetry as held by Yeats and secondly, it revealed the age as refracted through his eyes. It is furthermore, a treatise of Yeats' peculiar opinion about the worth of various modern poets and his reaction against the pace and complexity of modern life. The book showcases his vision of modernity, his discomfort with its consequences and the reaction of others at his selection and omissions. The anthology also explores the role of the poet or an artist in the modern world and quite appropriately, he chose Walter Pater's *Mona Lisa* the acclaimed portrait of an artist, to begin his anthology.

A compilation of 379 poems by 97 poets till 1935, the book created a fracas in the literary fraternity soon after its release in 1936. The anthology was. Yeats drew flak for his rather biased and prejudiced selection which seemed to defy any logic or methodical approach. Yeats has been indicted for relying on recommendation of friends and earlier anthologies instead of a systematic attempt to go through periodicals or individual poetic collections to select relevant material for *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*. There seemed no rationale behind the choice of poets and the space given to them. Lesser known poets such as Edith Sitwell, W. J. Turner, Dorothy Wellesley, Herbert Read and Laurence Binyon have been given more space while War Poets have been omitted altogether. The four pages devoted to Thomas Hardy or the poems selected for inclusion in the Anthology hardly do justice with his range and scope as a writer and poet. On a similar plane, Yeats ignored Eliot's masterpieces such as *The Wasteland, Ash Wednesday* or *Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* and chose to represent him through a selection from the early poems, *Preludes, The Hippopotamus, Whispers of Immortality, Sweeney among the Nightingales, To Hollow Men* and *The Journey of the Magi*. Most poets and critics regarded it “unrepresentative of the main current of modern poetry” or rather reactionary in its approach.

Amongst the various unexpected and startling inclusions in *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* was Tagore's certain unrhymed poems, assorted poems of certain American, South African, Australian and poets from other English speaking countries. He gave special
place to Irish authors, many of them obscure Irish writers for their modernistic approach and their receptivity to change and loss of hierarchies. He even whimsically declared Oliver Gagorty, an Irishman, one of the greatest English poets and included seventeen of his poems as against two of Rudyard Kipling's poems and six of John Masefield and A. E. Housman. In fact, because of its overtly Irish flavour, the book was dismissed by Yeats' detractors as being \textit{notéably} fairly assembled. Yeats' selection of four of Thomas Hardy's lesser known poems: \textit{Weathers}, \textit{Snow in the Suburbs}, \textit{Night of Trafalgar} and \textit{Former Beauties} do not justly represent Hardy's range and depth of thought. Most critics also attacked his selection vituperatively for his misrepresentation and ill-presentation of the modern age - a period with which he did not seem to connect much. Making evident his abhorrence for realism is apparent from his selections for his anthology, Yeats ignored many well known poets of the contemporary literary ethos. For instance, major American poets like William Carlos, William Robert Frost, and Wallace Stevens were totally omitted on the flimsy pretext that only those American poets who had a European presence in the 1930s had been included in the anthology. Similarly, War poets like Wilfred Owen were truncated on the pretext that \textit{passive suffering is not the theme for poetry} thereby inviting the wrath of his detractors. Many felt that the expression of futility, indignation and savage denunciation of the wars by such poets could not be dismissed as passive or impassionate outcry. In fact, Yeats is accused of distancing himself from the younger poets. However, Yeats' motive in selecting poems though apparently arbitrary seems to be driven by a different purpose. In a letter to Laura Riding, Yeats has revealed his intend and purpose behind the editing of the anthology:

I am a despotic man, trying to impose my will upon the times not cooperative. My anthology has, however, a first domestic object, to get under one cover poems I want to read myself to a friend, or to my children. I do not care whether a poem has been in a hundred anthologies. I do not think that a reason for including or excluding it. If I give my anthology to a man or as is more likely to a woman, I must be able to say this is my table of values. (CL#6541, 26 April 1936)

Justifying his stand on the reception of the book, Yeats wrote to Purohit Swami whose poems had been included in the anthology:

é the anthology is having emmence [sic] sale but is being attacked with great virulence by people I have left out or by their friends and husbands. Instead of putting in everybody who had some little scrap of reputation, I have only put in the people I
thought good poets. I never thought of doing anything else and have done it seems something unheard of. (CL #6760, 21 Dec 1936)

Hence though he was virulently attacked by critics for his whimsical choices in selecting poems and poets for the anthology, his own avowed assertion in the introduction to the book cannot be dismissed as superfluous or irrelevant. Yeats does not claim to represent an age or reflect his time or identify future poets. Instead, he uses it as an opportunity to enumerate the past poets whom he had read and admired or the current verses which he found compelling and the poets who have contributed in the formulation of his own poetic ideology or aesthetics. In this sense, the anthology is not about defining his ethos or prophesying about the future of poetry. Although Yeats' avowed aim in compiling the anthology was to include in the book all good poets who have lived or died from three years before the death of Tennyson [in 1892] to the present moment [in 1935], many critics believe that Yeats took up editing of *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* not only to tide over his financial concerns but also to explore his own modernist views and to relate to the younger generation of writers. A poet whose poetics was dominated by the Pre Raphaelite influences, Victorian Sensibilities and overtly Romantic inclinations, Yeats tries to explore his connect with the Moderns through this anthology.

*The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* also highlights Yeats' understanding and appreciation of rhythm and beauty as an essential component of poetry. Believing that the poet should allow his poem to arise out of its own rhythm, he appreciates Pater, Turner and Pound for their excellence in this regard. In a letter to Ellen O'Leary, Yeats wrote:

> Words are always getting conventionalized to some secondary meaning. It is one of the works of poetry to take the truants in custody and bring them back to their right senses. Poets are the policemen of language; they are always arresting these old reprobates, the words. (*L* 109)

Thus despite the meanderings of Yeats' critical deliberations on poets and poetry, it cannot be denied that most of his ideas seemed associated with the tenets of Romanticism. Yeats clearly supported dramatic, well-defined, spontaneous and sensuous poetry. Perceiving it to be a means of escape from the hard realities of life, he propagated personal poetry which reflected the intense tragedy of the poet and evoked similar feelings in the readers. This belief in the validity of the personal poetry which was central to his Romantic leanings remained
constant throughout his life. Thus a self-proclaimed "Last Romantic," Yeats seemed to follow the tenets of Romanticism in both his prose and poetry.

Moreover, Yeats also differed from the Victorians and the Modernists in this regard for while they connected imagination and personality in their poetics, Yeats evolved a theory wherein he tried to establish a dynamic relationship between will and imagination. Consequently, his poetry which was an extension of his Romanticism was the poetry of personal utterance, unlike that of Pound or Eliot. Like Byron and Shelley, Yeats exhibited the tension between the experimental chaos and the artistic control in his critical and literary oeuvre. Like them, he was overtly self-conscious of this tension, a tension traceable to the Romantic and Post-Romantic understanding of the nature of poetry. Besides, through The Oxford Book of Modern Verse, Yeats explored the popularity of the Ezra-Eliot-Auden school amongst the younger generation. Viewed from this angle, his choice of poems and poets in the anthology are reflective of his Victorian sensibilities and neo-Romantic reaction against the pace and the complexity of the modern era. In his autobiography, he records that his interest in the esoteric spirituality and Irish folktales was a reaction against imperialism and the scientific rationalism of the Victorian era that he came to rate "with monkish hate."

In fact, the question "What is Modern?" perplexed Yeats. In his introduction to this anthology, he asserted that the term modern could be used to refer to one's contemporaries. However, by 1935, the term became popularly associated with the artistic and literary movement of the early 20th century. In fact, literary critics and readers alike began to concentrate more on Yeats as a contemporary of the moderns like Eliot, Pound and Auden, overlooking his association with the Victorian and the Edwardian periods. However, his relation to the Modernist tradition is rather complex. While the modernists generally regarded the language of poetry as quantitatively different from other forms of language, and differentiated between the referential and denotative language of communication and the autotelic and connotative language of arts (Journet 41), Yeats thought differently. Insisting on retaining the cognitive value for a poem, Yeats advocates personal and subjective poetry instead of the objective, and impersonal poetry promoted by the modern writers.

With the intent to give free play to imagination and to prevent extraneous motives from putting the imagination into handcuffs (Ex 201), Yeats, although admitting moral as integral to the structure of a poem, disapproved of associating a poem with any ephemeral political or social needs. Nevertheless, his views on poetics are not dogmatic but flexible and
presented insights into the nuances of literature mainly because they were characterized by his personal experience as a poet and a prose writer and hence held greater relevance and validity. Though his ideas on poetry evolved as he matured as a poet, certain ideas and theories stand out from his critical repertoire. Yeats' assertion that poetry is a product of a quarrel with oneself redefined the concept of poetry. It adds a new dimension to the Romantic theory of poetry being an outpour of powerful emotions recollected in tranquillity or Mallarme's assertion that poetry is composed not of ideas but words. To Yeats, it is the strife and the quarrel with ourselves that creates poetry.

Though his finesse and expertise as a literary critic has been an issue of much debate, it is undeniably true that his reputation as a poet undermined his standing as a playwright or a literary critic. Yeats' critical and artistic credo was seasoned by his own personal experiences as a poet, a dramatist and a prose writer. Hence most of his critical observations are exemplified in his works as well especially poetry. There have been long drawn debates on the issue of his allegiance. The critics have been divided since the turn of the 20th century to establish whether Yeats was a Romantic or Victorian or a Modernist like Eliot, Auden or Pound. His critical theories and the voluminous output of prose and letters point towards his commitment to the Romantic tradition. Reacting creatively to this school, he reassessed and re-ordered the Romantics according to his own precepts of their contribution to this school of thought. Thus while establishing Blake as a precursor of the movement, he eccentrically rejected the merit of Wordsworth as a Romantic or a source of inspiration. Nevertheless, it is a fact that though he may have reformed, re-invented or re-framed the Romantic ideology yet he never repudiated this tradition in favour of the classical or the modernist conception of art and literature. His experiments with the modern school of literature met with limited success primarily because he could never break free from his inherent Romanticism. No wonder Harold Bloom called him the conscious heir of the Romantics (Yeats 7) and Yeats regards himself the last Romantic. However, both Northrop Frye and Harold Bloom accuse Yeats of distorting the vision of his Romantic ancestors and of a demonic misreading of the Romantic tradition in his repressive defence against the anxiety of influence and in particular against the composite romantic precursor he had found out of Shelley, Blake and Pater (Bloom 216).

Indubitably, Yeats' extraordinary and capacious imagination, his eclecticism and his ability to transform everything to a poetic use sets him apart from other literary figures with
limited exposure, range and vision. Yeats displays unmistakable combination of clarity and argumentative quality in his critical writings. In fact, as a critic he strived to reconcile theory with practice and in the process continued to reform both theory and practice alike. Influenced by a motley crowd of men- O'Leary, Pater, Oscar Wilde and Blake, he was also conscious of the various pulls and a large variety of interests of his age. Since his own interests were opposed to one another, his literary criticism, in spite of its basic undercurrents of unity, shows apparent contradictions. Nevertheless, this disparity and his constant endeavour to achieve unity, constitutes the greatness of his critical achievements. His critical observations may not be always academic or ideologically committed or may lack the orderliness, the dogmatic character and insistence or impatience for other's point of view yet they have a definitive stamp of the lively reaction of a critic to the various artistic and ideological needs and challenges of his age. Concurrently, there is a visible preference for the Romantic themes, aspiration and imagination in the majority of his critical credo.