Chapter 5

A STUDY OF THE POLITICAL POETRY OF W.B. YEATS

Yeats's poetic career is generally divided by the critics into two main phases: the earlier and the later poetry. The earlier poetry, critics feel, lacks in passionate intensity and vitality because of the lush ornamentation and languid rhythms. The later poetry gains in living and dramatic intensity because of the sharpness and vividness of the images used due to the pressure of Irish events. But that is an over-simplification of Yeats's political and social thought which forms the background and is indeed one of the vital features of his poetry. What we must keep in mind is that Yeats's early poetry is characterised by its too obvious national sentiment and is really a reflection of Yeats's apolitical stance at that stage. But Irish events form and develop in the later poetry which is at once political and public and personal. We have shown in the earlier chapters that Yeats's outlook was deeply coloured by his romantic conservatism. This romantic conservatism however assumes a concrete form in his case. He articulates the romantic conservative ideas and attitudes specifically through his reaction to Irish events and personalities. There is something romantic about his understanding of the Protestant Ascendancy and the way he adheres to them. Though his poetic personality is rooted in the Irish tradition we feel that his philosophy and poetry are far from a distillation of the
tradition. In my readings on Yeats I have not so far noticed any mention of the fact that as far back as the early phase of his poetry Yeats is not seen to be perfectly aligned to the Irish tradition. His Protestant bias must have cut him off from living sympathy with the emotions of the majority who were Catholic. He is more happy in the realm of fairies and other ethereal beings showing his romantic preferences. His passionate attachment to Maud Gonne may have helped him and brought him closer to the Irish people and their aspirations. But even so a hiatus remained and later on his reservations and objections became stronger. This will be demonstrated in what follows.

One of the characteristics of Irish literature was a self-conscious celebration of violence. The age of national unrest had its impact on the literature of the period. The theme of violence is never far from the surface. In fact violence is one of the distinctive features of Irish life at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This is reflected in the work of the young Irelanders whose verses were overtly political. In Yeats this preoccupation acquires a new richness.

For Yeats this confrontation with violence leads to an inner doubt about the nature of violence and whether it was a decisive factor in the nationalist movement. As patriot and artist he was conscious of this fact on two different levels. Firstly he was aware of the revolutionary necessity of violence
as parliamentary methods seemed to have failed. Yet as a sensitive man he was instinctively repelled by violence. This inner tension between patriotic feelings and national misgivings leads to a double vision in most of his political poetry. It was in a sense a coming to terms with the harsher aspects of Irish life. His poetry moves through a series of contrasts between images of violence and of peace and security which are juxtaposed and which gives to the poetry its ironic complexity. It brings out a paradoxical creativity which is perhaps nurtured amidst violence. Unlike other Irish poets who celebrate violence like Pearse, Yeats abhors violence because it brings ruin to the things he loves. Yet his poetry abounds in images of violence which he realizes is at the heart of change whether social or political. For Yeats change is inevitable but the new order is not necessarily better. This question of change assumes a double meaning in his poetry. The poetry rests on a conflict between images of violence which signify change and images of security which represent his longing for the older feudal order of peasant and noble. This shows his romantic bias.

This theme of ruin, violence and exile lie at the heart of Irish literature and Yeats is no exception to this rule, though he uses these themes to illustrate his inner tensions and doubts about the nature of nationalism. Even in early Gaelic literature one of the keynotes of poetry is the theme of exile that is poignant in its reminder of its Irish heritage. A good example is Columcille's "Farewell to
Delightful to be on the hill of Howth
Before going over the white-haired sea,
The dashing of the wave against its face,
The bareness of its shores and of its borders.

Delightful to be on the hill of Howth
After coming over the white-bosomed sea,
To be rowing one's little coracle,
Alas! on the wild-waved share.

Great is the speed of my coracle
And its stern turned upon Derry
Grevious is my errand over the main,
Travelling to Alba of the beetling brows.

My foot in my tuneful coracle
My sad heart tearful
A man without guidance is weak
Blind are all the ignorant.

There is a grey eye
That will look upon Ireland
It shall never see again
The men of Ireland nor her women.  

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1. Joseph Shipley (ed.), Encyclopaedia of Literature
Columcille's 'Farewell to Ireland' translated by Meyer
Vol. 2 (New York: Philosophical Literary, 1946), p. 597
This theme of exile represents an inner shift in the case of Yeats. He uses this theme to explain his own sense of inadequacy, in the face of an overwhelming nationalism, which was characterized by the religious domination of the Roman Catholic majority. He is an exile because of his Anglo-Irish background which was never fully assimilated to the Roman Catholic culture of the majority. But he is also aware of the literary and cultural need, besides the more obvious political one of the need to unify the Irish heritage. Therefore the theme of exile gains in poignancy because it is not merely as a patriot he is talking about exile. It assumes new social dimensions in his poetry. It illustrates the tensions between his hopes and the reality confronting him. He clings to his Anglo-Irish heritage as a refuge in the face of a militant, mainly Roman Catholic domination of Irish nationalism.

Public concerns become deeply intertwined with his social and political outlook. It is this concern which leads Yeats to adapt Ireland as a symbol in his poetry. This inherited love of Ireland is linked to his search for a view of life that would be Irish and yet universal in its values. In fact the most unifying of his symbols was Ireland itself. It was both a personal and collective symbol. And yet nationalism as reflected in his early poetry remains confined to a certain conventional use of stock themes and attitudes. It does not reveal the diversity and richness of his thought. It is still in the process of identification.
When seen in this light we can trace the link between his poetry and thought. He is involved in the nationalist movement but he remains curiously apolitical which is a result of the tension between a national and personal identity. This national identity expressed itself in the Irish Literary Revival which engaged his energies and stimulated his interest. In many ways it was a search for his own identity. This pull between a national and personal identity which involves his own Protestant tradition creates a tension between the poet and the man. But Yeats had a vision of life fuller and richer than a simple patriotism might have afforded. With his sensitivity, intelligence and culture he wanted a union of all that was best in the Irish heritage with all that his imagination and experience found noble and beautiful. It stemmed from a patriotism that was romantic and emotional in its impulse but was controlled by his search for stability in order and tradition. By 'noble' Yeats does not only mean the Protestant gentry, but it becomes an all-inclusive word covering all aspects. It has political, social, literary, cultural, artistic and educational connotations. It becomes a hallmark of an aristocracy of culture founded upon the intellect and emotion. This illustrates his romantic-conservative ideology.

Since Yeats is primarily an Irish poet his vision is intimately connected with the Irish heritage in all its aspects. His earlier poetry has a self-conscious and didactic purpose of proclaiming and identifying himself as a
national poet. This dichotomy between his public utterances and inner doubts is reflected in the prose written at this period. If we look at his Autobiographies this sense of commitment and inner tension is brought out in his descriptions of his boyhood and later the circle in which he moved as a young man. Thus on the one hand we have a poet who deliberately set out to create in verse a distinctive nationalist literature and on the other hand his prose works reveal his basic ambivalent attitude to the cause of Irish nationalism. This reveals two things. First it draws out Yeats's inherent leaning towards his own Anglo-Irish heritage and secondly, his romantic concept of nationalism was the result of a deliberate and conscious posture as a nationalist. It was not a spontaneous gesture on his part. It also reveals Yeats's basic poetic process. He is aware of these contradictions which he tries to resolve through his theory of the mask which is a deliberate assumption of a contrary poetic personality. Therefore his nationalism which was a deliberate choice in the early poetry is contrasted with his Anglo-Irish heritage as revealed in his prose. As will be pointed out later nationalism is more closely defined within Yeats's social and political outlook in the later poetry and this narrowing down of perceptiveness adds to the greatness of the poems.

In the earlier poems the love of Ireland is inseparable from a love of nature and the rural way of life, similar in mood to that of old Gaelic poetry in which man and
nature are shown in a close relationship based on harmony and sensitivity. For example "The Hag of Beare" ninth century the woman's lament for youth is set in a series of contrasts which is illuminated through similes drawn from the countryside, making the message direct and simple and thereby gaining in poignancy and nostalgia.

Lovely the mantle of green
Our Lord spreads on the hillside
Every spring the divine craftsman
Plumps its worn fleece.

But my cloak is mottled with age
No, I'm beginning to dote -
Its only grey hair straggling
Over my skin like a lichened oak.²

In "The Fenian Cycle" which was later used as a source of many Irish myths and legends in modern Irish literature the poem "Scéib Lem Duib" brings out the interest in nature that was one of the striking features of Gaelic poetry.

Fern clumps redden
Shapes are hidden
Wildgees raise
Wonted cries.³

3. "Scéib Lem Duib" Version Flann O'Brien, Ibid., p. 79
Modern Irish literature rests on this self-conscious awareness of its Gaelic heritage and its use of it is in the main patriotic and romantic. Yeats's superiority to the other contemporary poets of the late nineteenth century lies in his richer vision. He is far more aware of contradictions.

For Yeats this search for a Gaelic tradition was in the main literary and romantic. It was part of his public stance as an Irish poet. It was a deliberate and conscious adaptation of Gaelic legends and folklore to project a unified vision of Irish culture which would encompass both Protestant and Catholic traditions. What is to be noted is the general tone in the poetry and prose, as can be seen from the passages given below. Nothing is particularised, the appeal is to the general mood of patriotism pervading the whole of Ireland. It shows the romantic thrust of his mind.

In Gaelic literature we have something that the English-speaking countries have never possessed a great folk literature. 4

Three types of men have made all beautiful things. Aristocracies have made beautiful manners, because their place in the world puts them above the fear of life and the countryman have made beautiful stories and beliefs, because they have nothing to

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lose and so do not fear, and the artists have
made all the rest, because Providence has filled
them with recklessness.\footnote{W.B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions "Poetry and
Tradition", The Cutting of an Agate\textsuperscript{w}, 1907 (London :
Macmillan, 1961), p. 251}

Significantly all three are interpreted by Yeats in the light
of his own ideals - his preference of a life of noble and
passionate intensity and daring. It is based on his ideal of
a society of noble and peasant which does not find place in
the modern democratic consciousness of the people of Ireland.
This points to his inner leanings towards his Anglo-Irish
heritage inspite of his public assertions. In the
\textit{Autobiographies} we are conscious of this sense of isolation
but Yeats was determined to seek out and celebrate Irish myth
and legend in poetry and prose and to uphold a unity of
culture by unifying Catholic and Protestant Ireland. This is
an example of Yeats's stubborn romanticism because the
Catholic and the Protestant tradition were never united even
by the flood-tide of Irish nationalism. This difference is
brought out in Yeats's comments on Edward Martyn and George
Moore both men who wrote during the Irish Literary Revival.

In Martyn too one finds an intellect which should
have given creative power, but in Martyn the
sterility is complete, though unlike Moore he has
self-possession and taste. He only fails in words.
It is as though he had been put into the wrong body. Both men are examples of the way Irish civilization is held back by the lack of education of Irish Catholic women. An Irish Catholic will not marry a Protestant, and hitherto the women have checked again and again the rise, into some world of refinement, of Catholic households. The whole system of Irish Catholicism pulls down the able and well-born if it pulled up the peasant, as I think it does. A long continuity of culture like that at Coole could not have arisen and never has arisen in a single Catholic family in Ireland since the middle ages.  

Yet inspite of his personal inclination towards an aristocratic order of society and his views about the Protestant landed gentry he was aware of the political and cultural need of uniting the two Irelands. With this purpose in mind, though conscious of the duality of his thought, he set out to create a nationalistic literature, overtly political and Irish. He found his examples in the life and writings of O'Leary who helped focus his attention on a literary ideal at a time when he was beset with doubts about the contrary facets of his personality.

Immediately after its publication, or just before,
I fell under the influence of two men who were to

influence deeply the Irish intellectual movement—old John O'Leary the Fenian leader, in whose library I found the poets of young Ireland, and Standish O'Grady who had rewritten in vigorous romantic English certain Irish heroic legends. Because of the talk of these men, and the books the one lent and the other wrote, I turned my back on foreign themes, decided that the race was more important than the individual.  

This conscious aligning of himself to Irish nationalistic ideals was the result of a crisis in his identity because of his revolt against his father's scientific rationalism which he felt went against his inclinations and interests. He consciously tried to find a poetic personality that would resolve his acute dilemma. He turned to his Irish background to resolve these differences. He felt that by basing his poetry and thought on the Irish folk-life he could maintain and combine his romantic and conservative interests and anchor his dream of the noble and the peasant.

Folk art is, indeed, the oldest of the aristocracies of thought and because it refuses what is passing and trivial, the merely clever and pretty, as certainly as the vulgar and the insincere, and because it has

gathered into itself the simplest and most unforgettable thoughts of the generations, it is the soil where all great art is rooted. Wherever it is spoken by the fireside, or sung by the roadside, or carved upon the lintel, appreciation of the arts that a single mind gives unity and design to, spreads quickly when its hour is come.  

Yeats's self-conscious impulses to create a political literature was related to the general trend of the Irish literary revival. There was this obvious adaptation of the Gaelic heritage. Therefore Yeats's aims merged with the major trends which involved romantic celebration of the Gaelic heritage. His poetry and his prose do not reveal great subtlety. For example from the passages quoted what is to be pointed out is that it does not have literary merit but its interest lies in its propaganda value. In a sense Yeats is going against his own values, but one feels that his early poetry is too obvious, the facile nationalism of the early poetry is immature. He attaches himself to the general mood. Alongside this is the conscious aim of writing propaganda prose bringing out the difference between intent and focus.

I have a good deal of work to do at present, more than I can manage, all at Irish literary subjects

8. W.B. Yeats, 'By the Roadside', 'The Celtic Twilight' *Mythologies*, p. 139
which is as it should be. I wish you had made up
the Irish novelists and folklorists. You with
your ready pen would find plenty to say about them.
There is a want for a short book (about hundred and
fifty pages or two hundred) on Irish literature.
Lives and criticism of all the writers since Moore.
It would sell largely, I hope and do good work I am
sure. Some day you or I must take it in hand. There
is a great want for a just verdict on these men, and
their use for Ireland. I have often thought of
setting about such a book and may when I have got
on more with the novel writers.9

If we turn to the poetry written at this time we are aware of
this conscious posing as an Irish poet. He sees himself as a
conscious craftsman bridging the old and the new, between
colonial Ireland and a newly developing national consciousness
that was militant and aggressive in its outlook. The poetry
is general in tone and there is an obvious link between the
subject and its transformation into patriotic art. In the
erlier poems the love of Ireland is inseparable from a love
of nature and the rural way of life, similar in mood to that
of old Gaelic poetry. "Red Hanrahan's Song About Ireland"
the wildness of nature is compared to the violent upsurge

9. Allan Wade (ed.) The Letters of W.B. Yeats, Letter to
Katherine Tynan, August 1889, p. 133
of nationalism sweeping all over Ireland. Similarly in 'To Ireland in the Coming Times' the forces of nature are likened to a wave of patriotism spreading over Ireland and the poet himself. It is romantic in its impulse.

For the elemental creatures go
About my table to and fro,
That hurry from unmeasured mind
To rant and rage in flood and wind.  

What is striking is that Yeats is drawing parallels on the surface, it is a sort of external unthinking patriotism which values its own emotive appeal. There is no really deep thought on the issue. This change in his view of nationalism is reflected in the imagery used. Though there is a shift in emphasis from the rural to the "urban", he is not urban in the sense that T. S. Eliot is. This "urban" experience of Yeats is limited to his concept of Irish nationalism and his social and political outlook. It is, however, deeply rooted in the land, which is a reflection of the inherent Irishness of Yeats. This use of the land is seen in his use of animal and nature imagery which are developed consistently from the earlier to the later thus bringing in a continuity in theme and pattern of images. In the later poetry the nature and animal imagery tend to centre on a more personal and

10. W. B. Yeats, 'To Ireland in the Coming Times' Collected Poems, p. 57
introspective mood than the images used in the earlier poetry.

For example in 'Red Hanrahan's Song About Ireland' Yeats seems to want to reveal a more public mood - he is identifying himself as an Irish patriot, thus the imagery is also generalised, whereas, for example, in "Coole Park and Ballylee" 1931 the mood turns on his deep personal emotions. He is trying to define the concept of the soul in physical terms. It also hints at the passing away of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy.

Another emblem there'. That stormy white
But seems a concentration of the sky;
And, like the soul, it sails into the sight
And in the morning's gone, no man knows why. 11

Thus in his early poetry the portrait of Ireland is idealistic in the sense that it seems to capture the new spirit of nationalism. It is dreamy and idealistic and romantic based on the folklore of peasant life. It represents Yeats's idealization of this aspect of nationalism - the peasant spirit. In Crossways (1889) Irish legends have shaped the poems like 'The Meditations of Father O-Hart' and 'The Ballad of Moll Magee' and 'The Ballad of the Fox-Hunter. But what is noteworthy is that Yeats is using stock characters to depict Irish life. These characters are representative but they do

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11. W.B. Yeats, 'Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931', Collected Poems, p. 275
not offer us any vivid insight. They are idealistic and bring to mind an Irish life untouched by the complexity of contemporary political events. They are apolitical in nature and their merit lies in their pictorial quality and the contrast they develop in relation to his Indian poems where the character of the interest is rather metaphysical.

The unity of this volume is stressed through the theme of time. In all the poems the action and contemplation is measured against time which is seen as a leveller and destroyer and it helps to bring out the difference between age and youth, reverie and action, the fairy world of dreams and the physical world which is represented by animal imagery standing for creative energy and realism. Thus his Irish poems are important not in themselves because they do not offer any social or political insights but bring out his metaphysical interest which he developed in this volume. This metaphysical interest we may also call romantic.

This theme of time and its ravages which brings sorrow is also developed in "The Wanderings of Óisin" (1889). This poem connects with his intention of adopting a public stance in his poetry. It is linked with his work for the Irish literary revival. But though it is Irish in setting, the general themes which are brought out are similar to the themes in "Crossways".

Yeats is still in the process of exploring his Irish identity as nationalist and poet. In "The Rose" the symbol
of the rose is used to depict his Irishness in 'To Ireland in
the Coming Times'. But his use of the 'rose - bordered hem'
is merely suggestive and what is more important is that the
accent is more on Yeats's personal ambition of being
recognized as a nationalist poet. He is conscious of the
need to assert himself in purely Irish terms, therefore he
uses this symbol because it was closely associated with
nationalistic ideals as reflected in Mangan's 'Dark Rosaleen'.
He is using a conventional symbol to draw out the expected
and therefore conventional notion of a patriotic poet.

Know, that I would accounted be
True brother of a company
That sung, to sweeten Ireland's wrong,
Ballad and story, rann and song,
Nor be any less of them,
Because the red-rose bordered hem
Of her, whose history began
Before God made the angelic clan
Trails all about the written page. 12

In "To the Rose Upon the Road of Time" Yeats uses the symbol
of the rose as an explicit political symbol to bring out his
own standing as an Irish poet. The political connotations of
the rose symbol lie in the emotional nationalism it

12. "To Ireland in the Coming Times", "The Rose" Collected
Poems, p. 56
represented in Mangan's 'Dark Rosaleen'.

In Yeats's poem because of his romantic inclinations however, the symbol of the rose also has mystical and supernatural allusions and because of that the style becomes decorative and over-wrought. This is also partly the result of the ambiguous and apolitical stance of Yeats at this time. He is trying firstly to establish himself as a nationalist poet and that is why he uses conventional symbols. But he is also aware of the duality of his thought, the confrontation between the Anglo-Irish heritage and nationalism. That is why his early poetry is based on a general and conventional notion of a romantic and emotional patriotism. This is reflected in the style — the over ornamentation and decorative imagery. It lacks in depth because of the basic ambivalence of his position as nationalist and poet. Hence the curiously apolitical stance inspite of the conscious adoption of a pose as patriot. Thus in 'To the Rose Upon the Road of Time' there is very little political significance in this symbol of the rose.

Red Rose, proud Rose, Sad Rose of all my days!
Come near me, while I sing the ancient ways;
Cuchulain battling with the better tide;
The Druid, grey, wood - nurtured, quiet-eyed,
Who cast round Fergus dreams, and ruin untold. 13

13. W.B. Yeats, "To the Rose Upon the Road of Time"
Collected Poems, p. 35
There is too much emphasis on his proclaiming himself as an Irish poet. But his prose reveals his inner doubts and uncertainties. Thus, though the emphasis is on Irish folklore yet Yeats clings to an ornate style which was more part of the tradition of the group of poets in the eighteen nineties in Ireland who looked towards eastern and Christian mysticism in an attempt to define the supernatural which was an integral part of their poetry and thought. The idiom, setting and mood are part of the cult of the aesthetes in the nineties and reveals an English and continental influence. It is also a reflection of his personal dilemma - an Anglo-Irish writer writing in the tradition of English literature but receptive to the Gaelic tradition in a conscious attempt to define himself in specifically Irish terms. The fascination of Irish folk legend is dramatised in The Land of Hearts Desire. The title itself indicates Yeats's public and personal ambition to think himself as an Irish poet. But the dualism in the nature of the fairies reflects his conscious aims and his urge to define his Irish experience in a specifically Anglo-Irish context.

I often entangle myself in arguments more complicated than even those paths of Inchy as to what is the true nature of apparitions. But at other times I say as Socrates said when they told him a learned opinion about a nymph of the Illissus, 'The common opinion is enough for me', and believe that all nature is full
of invisible people, and that some of these are ugly or grotesque, some wicked or foolish, many beautiful beyond anyone we have seen, and that the beautiful are not far away when we are walking in pleasant and quiet places. Even when I was a boy I could never walk in a wood without feeling that at any moment I might find before me somebody or something I had long looked for without knowing what I looked for. 14

In his collection of poems "The Wind Among the Reeds" (1899) the poem "The Valley of the Black Pig" suggests the possibility of a battle rather than an actual event.

The dews drop slowly and dreams gather; unknown spears Suddenly hurtle before my dream-awakened eyes, And then the clash of fallen horseman and the cries Of unknown perishing armies beat about my ears. 15

Reflection becomes a keynote of a poetry that is dreamy, and nostalgic. Yeats uses traditional themes and these are identified in his poetry with his own growing awareness of himself as a poet and as a powerful figure in the new literary movement.

15. W.B. Yeats, "The Valley of the Black Pig", "The Wind Among the Reeds", p. 73
I, on the other hand, was more preoccupied with Ireland ... and took from Allingham and Walsh their passion for country spiritism and from Ferguson his pleasure in heroic legend, and while seeing all in the light of European literature found my symbols of expression in Ireland. One thought often possessed me very strongly. Now from the influence, mainly the personal influence of William Morris, I dreamed of enlarging hate, till we had come to hate with a passion of patriotism what Morris and Ruskin ... A new belief seemed coming that could be so simple and demonstrable and above all so mixed into the common scenery of the world, that it could set the whole man on fire and liberate him from a thousand obediences and complexities. We were to forge in Ireland a new sword on our old traditional anvil for that great battle that must in the end reestablish the old, confident joyous world ... . All who have any old traditions have something of aristocracy, but we had opposing us from the first, though not strongly from the first, a type of mind which had been without it in that of Davies, and which had made a new nation out of Ireland, that was once old and full of memories.16

16. W.B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions, pp. 248-50
This use of motifs and themes from peasant life may thus be seen as part of the movement that can be termed the Irish literary renaissance. With the fall of Parnell people had begun to seek an alternative outlet for national feeling, disillusioned as they were about parliamentary politics. The vacuum was filled by a literary movement which was less immediately political. Following the lull in Irish politics Yeats took the opportunity of furthering the interests of the national literary movement. It was a concrete manifestation of his desire to express himself on purely Irish terms. He also saw in it a means of edifying the public and thus he saw himself as a social critic and not merely as a poet. This is an important factor to be examined because it later paved the way to a social bias in his thought which is seen in part as inherent and part the result of actual experience. Therefore his poetry records and reveals Yeats as a social thinker in relation to Irish events.

_**Cathleen Ni Houlihan**_ produced in 1902 reveals Yeats at his most social and political. It records romantic nationalism at its most ideal. The image of the house standing for security is the central dominant image in the play. This image can be contrasted with the earlier play _The Countess Cathleen_ (1892). In this play the scene is set in famine stricken Ireland. This play and _Cathleen Ni Houlihan_ can be contrasted because in the former the conflict of good and evil, cause and event represent a moral triumph,
thus the message of the play is the victory of good over evil. Whereas in *The Countess Cathleen* the action is mainly a mental conflict in the hearts of the peasants resisting and then accepting the temptations of the Merchants, in *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* the stress is on external objects and what they represent – Delia Cahel's fortune, the house, the cattle and the land. Later Michael rejects this in favour of the freedom struggle represented by the old woman who is a symbol for Ireland.

It is a hard service they take that help me. Many that are red cheeked now will be pale-cheeked; many that have been free to walk the hills, the bogs and the rushes will be sent to walk hard streets in far countries; many a good plan will be broken; many that have gathered money will not stay to spend it; many a child will be born and there will be no father at its christening to give it a name. They that have red cheeks will have pale cheeks for my sake, and for all that, they will think they are well paid. 17

This shows Yeats using traditional themes to express himself as a public poet. He is deliberately arousing and appealing to nationalist sentiment. Thus his play was widely accepted as one of the most moving and patriotic of plays that the

Abbey Theatre produced. It signals Yeats's acceptance by the largely Roman-Catholic Irish society as a national poet. Moreover it marks his acceptance in the social milieu of nationalist Ireland which was dominated by the Roman Catholics. A romantic emotional nationalism, alongside a cult of heroism seemed to be the hallmark of the poetry of Yeats written at this time.

If we survey his plays written during this period from 1904 to 1917 they centre around this theme of heroism, of triumph and failure, the artist and society, and art and the imagination. On Baile’s Strand (1904), The Green Helmet (1910) and The Only Jealousy of Emer (1919) centre around Cuchulain, the legendary hero, bringing in the Cuchulain myth in the context of his poetry and plays. Cuchulain for Yeats becomes a means of identification with Irish tradition. He stands for heroism in his poetry and plays and it is this theme which is explored in his plays. The concept of heroism in these plays is a passionate blend heroism which is in keeping with the valour of the epic hero Cuchulain. This heroism has its corresponding elements in the romantic heroism of Irish history up to the time of Parnell’s fall from power. In this connection it is easy to trace the connection between Parnell and Cuchulain. Both hold the same place in relation to his heroic poetry and both have epic status, for Yeats. What makes them vulnerable and human is their tragic flow - the impulsive, heroic and passionate
nature which has in it elements of its own self-destruction.

Thus the Parnell crisis was significant because it forced Yeats to reexamine his options. He had to consider his own position as an Irish poet writing in the tradition of the Anglo-Irish heritage and as part of the nationalistic trends in Irish society. This crisis is revealed in the gradual but perceptible change in his works. The rawness of the passion is still there but it reveals a change from the highly ornate style of the earlier poetry and plays. This ornate style was a result of his formal and deliberate response to Irish nationalism. It lacks in vitality because of this obvious link and over-manipulated use of Irish themes.

Thus the Parnell crisis forced upon Yeats two different levels of reaction. He was disturbed by the divisive forces operating within Irish society. It also forced him to reconsider and examine his use of a nationalism that was simple in its appeal. It brings out his conservative sympathies, which developed in reaction to a facile and romantic nationalism. His later poetry is a result of this greater complexity because of Yeats's social and political thought which is rooted in this conflict between nationalism and his Anglo-Irish heritage. It is a poetry of commitment, not of an identification. This can be attributed largely to Yeats's social and cultural ideas which influenced his political, aesthetic and literary ideals. The change in his poetry from over-ornamentation to hardness and clarity in
perception and technique accompanied the change from a patriotism that was romantic and emotional in its appeal to a patriotism that became increasingly conservative and rigid in its views on Irish life and events. His romantic ideals led him to uphold the Ascendancy culture which also attracted his conservative ideas.

In 'In the Seven Woods' (1904) the title poem is indicative of the new element in style and mood. Reflection becomes action and the nature imagery brings in a new sense of rhythm and direction.

I have heard the pigeons of the Seven Woods
Make their faint thunder, and the garden bees
Hum in the lime-tree flowers; and put away
The unavailing outcries and the old bitterness
That empty the heart - I have forgot awhile
Tara uprooted, and new commonness
Upon the throne and crying about the streets
And hanging its paper flowers from past to past. 18

"Red Hanrahan's Song About Ireland" is another stepping stone towards a poetry that later becomes at once overtly political. Yet it still remains romantic in its impulse, its appeal is to a general notion of patriotism.

18. "In the Seven Woods" (1904), Ibid., p. 85
The old brown thorn-trees break in two
Over Cummen Strand
Under a bitter black wind that blows from the left hand;
Our courage breaks like an old tree in a black wind and dies,
But we have hidden in our hearts the flame out of the eyes
Of Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan.19

The opening verse suggests the bleakness of nature which is
in keeping with the desolation of Ireland under British rule.
But even from the bleakness comes hope born out of bitterness
and defeat which enkindles courage. Yeats suggests that even
bitterness and defeat have a rejuvenating influence because
it reawakens the aspirations of the people of Ireland.

The 'heavy flooded waters' and 'wet winds' suggest
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19. "Red Hanrahan's Song About Ireland" from "In the Seven
Woods", p. 90
20. "Place and People into Poetry" by Bryan MacMohan, "The
prevailing south-west wind, now as in ages past, conditions
the sites of houses, and to some extent, our style of
living and feeling, while the cyclorama of the skies with
its succession of cloud formations, and its vagaries of
lighting effects offers a prospect to which the spirit
readily responds. But above all, down the centuries there
The old brown thorn-trees break in two^over Cummen Strand
Under a bitter black wind that blows from the left hand;
Our courage breaks like an old tree in a black wind and dies,
But we have hidden in our hearts the flame out of the eyes
Of Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan.\(^\text{19}\)

The opening verse suggests the bleakness of nature which is in keeping with the desolation of Ireland under British rule. But even from the bleakness comes hope born out of bitterness and defeat which enkindles courage. Yeats suggests that even bitterness and defeat have a rejuvenating influence because it reawakens the aspirations of the people of Ireland.

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In contrast to the general mood of the earlier poem this love of the land now becomes restricted to a definite sense of personalities connected with the place. This love of the land which is a recurring feature in Irish literature becomes for Yeats intertwined in his later poetry with his own West of Ireland background. It narrows down to his Protestant heritage. Thus the land signifies a social mood, it is not national and representative as it was in his earlier poetry. This shows his conservative preferences which blend with his romantic celebration of this heritage.

This love of the land is linked to persons connected with his childhood and later to his associations as a youngman and later still as a public figure. The land and the people come to enjoy a unique position in his poetry and prose. It defines an attitude of mind and shows a change in Yeats’s attitude to the love of the land.

Although my wits have gone
On a fantastic ride, my horse’s flanks are spurred
By childish memories of an old cross Pollexfen,

has been the constant of Irish rain - delving, lashing, teeming, flogging in down-pour or by way of capricious change, moving in the semisilence of mist - seeping, sneaking, claying, and saturating in a conspiracy that silver sides the rock flanks and heliographs across valleys."

And of a Middleton, whose name you never heard,
And of a red-haired Yeats whose looks, although he died
Before my time, seem like a vivid memory.
You heard that labouring man who served my people
He said
Upon the open road, near to the Sligo quay -
No, No, not said, but cried it out - 'You have come again;
And surely after twenty years it was time to come.'
I am thinking of a child's vow sworn in vain
Never to leave that valley his father's called their home. 21

It is in a sense a home-coming. He upholds his own Anglo-Irish heritage after establishing himself as a national poet. Moreover this theme of exile in Yeats's poetry is closely linked to his romantic view of Irish nationalism and ideals which he feels is dying out in modern-day Ireland. These moments of heroism and of life lived at moments of passionate intensity are what Yeats upholds through his theme of exile which is interwoven with pain and loneliness. Exile and return, heroism and a lack of it lie at the heart of "September 1913". The irony lies in the difference between action and contemplation, romance, chivalry and modern day abstract political principles. Added to this is Yeats' view of nationalism which in this poem is seen through a historical

perspective. He is contrasting the notion of nationalism in the days of the early rebellions and as it is in the present. Thus the "wild geese" stand for a primarily Catholic view of nationalism. The "wild geese" signifies the historical background of Irish nationalism. The flight of the 'wild geese' standing for Patrick Sarsfield and his followers indicates a heroical mood. In Yeats's poem the flight of the geese is used in an ironic contrast to bring out the difference in the nationalism in modern-day Ireland which only brings further unrest and a dying out of heroism. The poem illustrates Yeats's romantic celebration of heroism coupled with his conservative fear of change.

Was it for this the wild geese spread
The grey wing upon every tide;
For this that all that blood was shed
For this Edward Fitzgerald died,
And Robert Emmet and Wolfe Tone, 22

Yeats is primarily attacking the Catholic dominated nationalism by contrasting it with the passion and idealism of the early Catholic nationalistic ideals. This is expressed in the image of the flight of the geese. For Yeats nationalism was not just confined to narrow political principles but it always implied a moral, cultural, social

and artistic responsibility. In this sense it is at its creative best. This was a basically romantic concept of nationalism and it is this factor and the contrast between the earlier concept of nationalism that is brought out.

It is a lament for the death of O'Leary and with him that of a heroic set of values. It is also an outward sign of Yeats's own sense of sorrow at the passing away of a romantic patriotism in himself. He cannot but change due to the pressure of Irish events which draw out his conservative stance. He uses satire as a double-edged weapon - it shows his scorn for the emerging middle classes and it is used to mock his own romantic impulses which he feels cannot cope with the new pressures besetting Irish society.

His use of repetition 'for this' points to a bitterness which stems in part from his views on culture and his Anglo-Irish heritage. This is brought out in his mentioning Emmet and Tone. He is deliberate in his use of their names, they are also part of his world, the Anglo-Irish world and like him are isolated in the face of a Catholic dominated nationalism.

The opening lines of "September 1913" ushers in Yeats at his satiric best.

What need you, being come to sense,
But fumble in a greasy till
And add the halfpence to the pence
And prayer to shivering prayer, 'till
You have dried the marrow from the bone?
For men were born to pray and save;
Romantic Ireland's dead and gone
Its with O'Leary in the grave. 23

The words "fumble" and "greasy" suggest the sordidness of the
dominance of Irish politics
attitude of the new set of people who dominate Irish politics
and society, the middle class. "Save" suggests the middle
class creed of thrift. What is even more disturbing in this
poem is a hint of sectarianism in Yeats, he is criticizing
the Roman Catholic Church, with its system of the Sunday
collection Box at Mass. The tone is muted but the Protestant
bias is unmistakable.

This hardening of attitude stems not only from a
conservatism born out of a tradition but also from a personal
choice. It was further rather romantic in its love of liberty
and individualism. This is what "September 1913" mourns - the
loss of a romantic ideal in the face of a regimented Catholic
nationalism. This ideal can be seen both in his love and in
his politics where he strives for a nobility associated with
the past, because of his reaction to contemporary Irish events
and the mob who he feels curtails individual liberties. It
developed in reaction to the Parnell crisis in 1891, his

23. "September 1913" Responsibilities, pp. 120-121
confrontation with the Irish middle class on the issues of Synge's play and the Hugh Lane pictures.

Yeats's interest in Irish events brings him a greater awareness of the duality in the nature of Irish nationalism. It has its creative as well as its destructive aspects and this change is reflected in his poetry which moves away from the idealism of Cathleen Ni Houlihan and the heroism that the early poetry and plays celebrate. In 'From the Green Helmet and Other Poems' (1910) "Upon a House shaken by the Land Agitation" the title is indicative of the political event even though the poem itself is more concerned with the destruction of the house and its values. It brings out how closely interrelated is his social and political thought. In the poem his love of old houses is closely associated with his Anglo-Irish heritage and the Protestant tradition. It is a shift in emphasis because the image of the house is a dominant image in his work. In his play Cathleen Ni Houlihan the house stands for security and possession which Michael rejects in favour of the old woman representing Ireland. But here the image has undergone a shift in focus. His social poetry almost invariably brings together two themes - the rise of the new middle class and urban culture and the contrast between it and the largely aristocratic tradition of the "Big House". The irony lies in the contrast. The decadent nature of the "Big House" and its culture is overshadowed by its tradition and what it implies for Yeats. His conservatism is mostly social in its origins. For Yeats this sense of
belonging led him to attack himself to the social tradition associated with the largely Protestant community of landowners though by origin he belonged to the middle class himself. This shows us the romantic nature of his conservatism. For him it was a question of identity and which also involved his Irishness. The focus of the poem is on the social aspect of the house rather than the political agitation itself. It is merely one of the many instances in which his social and political ideas coalesce to create a basically conservative stance. In Yeats's poetry the image of the house, and its attending images - domestic life, nature and animals almost invariably cluster around the central conservative bias of the poet himself. For him the theme of ruin is always associated with the Protestant Ascendancy.

How should the world be luckier if this house,
Where passion and precision have been one
Time out of mind, became too ruinous
To breed the lidless eye that loves the sun?
And the sweet laughing eagle thoughts that grow
Where wings have memory of wings, and all
That comes of the best knit to the best.24

The keynotes of this outlook is
A written speech
Wrought of high laughter, loveliness and ease.25

25. Ibid., p. 107
Yeats uses a system of contrasts to bring out the creativity and vitality in paradoxically a decadent tradition exemplified in the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy and the newly emerging middle classes characterized by a lack of vitality. "At Galway Races" Yeats uses the traditional image of the horseman to denote a certain proud detachment and to express an aristocratic ideal. This ideal is compared with the world of commerce represented in the figures of the merchant and the clerk. These two representative figures not only signify the middle class but also point to Yeats's disdain of materialism and commerce which he feels are antagonistic to his aristocratic ideal. Thus it draws a contrast between two ways of life - an industrial Ireland and a feudal Ireland.

The riders upon the galloping horses,
The crowd that closes in behind;
We, too, had good attendance once,
Hearers and hearers of the work;
Aye, horseman for companions,
Before the merchant and the clerk
Breathed on the world with timid breath. 26

For Yeats the rise of the middle class is a turning point in Irish history. It is a movement away from the traditional alignment of the peasant and the nobleman in a feudal society, which loses meaning in the urban society. Its values are

necessarily opportunistic and this for Yeats signifies a lack of culture and old values.

Power passed to small shopkeepers, to clerks, to that very class who had seemed to John O'Leary so ready to bend to the power of others, to men who had risen above the traditions of the countrymen, without learning those of cultivated life or ever educating themselves, and who because of their poverty, their ignorance, their superstitious piety, are much subject to all kinds of fear. Immediate victory, immediate utility, became everything, and the conviction, which is in all who have run great risks for a cause's sake, in the O'Leary's and Mazzini's as in all rich natures, that life is greater than the cause withered, and we artist's, who are the servants not of any cause, but of mere naked life, and above all that life in its nobler forms, where joy and sorrow are one, artificers of the great moment, became as elsewhere in Europe protesting individual voices. Ireland's great moment had passed, and she had filled no roomy vessels with strong sweet wine, where we have filled our porcelain jars against the coming winter. 

What is of great significance in this passage is the fact that Yeats's conviction that the artist serves "mere naked" life and above all the life in all its nobler forms is in conflict with the middle-class ideology which only knows narrow causes. It brings out the fundamental difference between Yeats's attitudes and convictions and those of the middle class which was bound to cause a rift in sentiment and ideology between Yeats and the majority of the Irish people. What we must keep in mind is that Yeats's greater poetry rests on the tension between the harsh realities of actual events and his own rich personal standards. He moves away from the general tone of his earlier poems and draws closer to his Anglo-Irish milieu. As a result his poetry achieves a topicality and significance through Anglo-Irish images which reveal the diverse nature of the Irish experience. It does not lose its greatness because of this narrowing of influence, it only shows a transition from Yeats's earlier position as a sentimental patriotic poet to one of wider awareness of events in their context. He is committed to a system of ideas which will hold meaning for him — his Romantic conservative ideology which is a means of reconciling the differences between contemporary events and his own personal values. This creates the tension in the poetry because of his search for stability clashes with the world of fluctuating values. It is the question of the 'imagination, blood and intellect' running together. The poetry at this stage becomes increasingly topical in its allusions.
In "Responsibilities" the theme of money is developed and is associated with the attitudes of the rising middle class - the people with the money and influence. He is contrasting this kind of materialism with a true nationalism which generates creative impulses which would enhance and enrich Irish culture and life. Closely related to this lack of culture is the image of blindness or cultureless state which Yeats feels expresses the failure of nationalism in its broadest sense in Ireland.

In "Paudeen" the artistic imagination and the attitude of the middle classes is contrasted. The image of blindness is here used to assume a feigned indifference to the attitude of the crowd.

Indignant at the fumbling wits, the obscure spite
Of our old Paudeen in his shop, I stumbled blind
Among the stones and thorn-trees under morning light.28

"Responsibilities" rests in the contrast between the ideal and the idealized and reality. It is a transitional phase. The tone is still general though the focus is now on his ideas of culture and nationalism. There is a redefining of his attitude on nationalism. From a patriotic, emotional and romantic nationalism which he explored in the earlier poetry

he now moves on to a cultural conception. It is a redefining of his views. He now begins to associate culture largely with his Anglo-Irish heritage in an explicit form. This explicitness is the result of Yeats's earlier explorations in the field of nationalism. "The Wild Swans at Coole" is Yeats at his most explicit. It celebrates Coole Park and the virtues and qualities of life which are associated with it. It is a poetry which is explicit in its social values, drawing out the most of his Protestant background and his conservative sympathies. The image of the swan, a romantic image, illustrates this - passion and precision which seems to exemplify the spirit of Coole Park, itself. Nature and art seems to be in perfect vision at Coole Park. The image of the house as used by Yeats has undergone a shift in focus. Earlier in his play Cathleen Ni Houlihan the image of the house is used as a constrastive image to bring out the effect that nationalism has on the people. Whereas now the image of the house is used to externalize Yeats's inner convictions. He is using a public emblem to represent his art and thought. Interwoven with this is the theme of time. Here time seems to have captured the essence of the unhurried life of ease at Coole Park. There is no sense of urgency, only a sense of waiting. In this volume the images of nature used are traditional images from the Irish landscape and this further intensifies the idea that his social ideas find expression in an Irish context.
What other could so well have counselled us
In all lovely intricacies of a house
As he that practised or that understood
All work in metal or in wood,
In moulded plaster or in carven stone. 29

In this poem "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory" the stress on hunting and horsemanship stress the importance Yeats gave to horse-riding. In all his poetry the image of the horseman and the horse commingle into a blend of passion and precision, culture and aristocracy, breeding and refinement. This delight in the passion of doing something and the skill in carrying it out form the basis of the next poem "An Irish Airman Foresees his Death". What is noteworthy in this poem is the bringing together of the national and international theme - the first world war and the love of Ireland. The success with which he unites these themes is brought out by the implicit irony in the poem. The joy of flying alone, of a proud detachment combining passion and precision, is the central idea, since the national and international events seem to lack a living vitality.

A lonely impulse of delight
Drove to this tumult in the clouds. 30

29. "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory" p. 151
In fact this quality of courtesy and passion becomes the central idea in Yeats's poetry. The romantic conservatism does not allow him to abandon the idealism of the early movement and it is again recaptured in "Michael Robartes and the Dancer" in "Easter 1916". The soothing quality of the earlier volume sustains him and gives him vigour before he moves to the vigorous energy and vitality of "Easter 1916". "Easter 1916" is his response to the Rising of 1916 which provided the background for one of the finest and most moving of Yeats's poems. "Easter 1916" is Yeats at his most passionate. It marks, in formal terms, a turning point in his poetry. It looks back and is in a sense a culmination of an emotional nationalism. But the passion and heroism which resulted in this Rising also marks the turning away of the middle classes from the heroic impulsive nature of the early stages of Irish nationalism. Thus the poem is both a triumph and a lament for the past. Apart from the public attitude Yeats's own moral dilemma is mirrored and in this lies the ambiguous nature of the poem. Yet it is undoubtedly Yeats at his most moving and dramatic. This idea of passion ennobling event gives a dramatic quality to the poem.

On Easter Monday 1916 members of the Irish volunteers took control over certain buildings and declared the establishment of an Irish republic. They held out for some days but additional troops were sent and the movement was suppressed at the cost of four hundred and fifty lives. Fifteen
leaders including Pearse were sentenced to death by court martial and executed.

Yeats's poem "Easter 1916" in a sense captures the essence of his poetic and political imagination. When seen in this light we can understand why it is one of the finest of his poems. It stands equidistant between the two determining phases of his career. The poem is a culmination of his nationalistic ideals which is crystallised in one heroic moment. It is an outstanding instance of Yeats as a national poet recording a public event. The general note of his earlier poetry leads up to this one event which has greatness, nobility and heroism. But this reveals only the surface of the poem. It is much more than that. It marks the expression of an old theme in a new way. It represents his conservatism which was always there hidden beneath the surface. This conservatism found expression in a variety of ways but now it tended to localise and particularise his love of the Anglo-Irish gentry. The poem therefore is a mark of the poet's sorrow - there are two contrasting moods - one of exaltation as a national poet - and the other of hesitation as a staunch conservative with a fear of change. These two contrasting moods can be summed up by the oxymoron he uses "terrible beauty".

Beauty suggests the heroism of the event, whereas "terrible" is emblematic of the poets' inner doubts and fears. Thus the whole poem is built on a series of contrasts.
The opening stanzas suggest the ordinariness of the people involved in the bloody event.

I have met them at close of day
Coming with vivid faces
From counter or desk among grey
Eighteenth century houses.  

But the event has transformed the ordinariness into something which has a hint of nobility in it because of the sacrifice.

All changed changed utterly
A terrible beauty is born.

The heroism is emphasised and yet we are aware of a shift in emphasis. This is indicated by the repetition of the word "change" followed by the oxymoron "terrible beauty". Yeats is uneasily aware that nationalism in Ireland could bring about a social revolution which would mean inevitable disaster to the landed gentry. This fear of change is suggested in the vision of Constance Gore-Booth.

Young and beautiful
She rode to harriers.

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32. Ibid., p. 203
33. Ibid.
There is a certain ironic connotation in the word "hunt" in the context of the poem as she is now one of the hunted. There is also an obvious parallel intended between the old landed gentry and their love of hunting and the later-day politics. The new militant nationalism was destined to trample down the old social order. This picture of a life being gradually undermined is brought by the third stanza which is full of animal imagery surging with life. It is significant that he depicts the image of the horse because for Yeats the horse always has its associations with the nobility in his poetry.

A horse-hoof slides on the brim
And a horse plashes within it;
The long-legged moor hen dives,
And hens to moor cocks call;
Minute by minute they live:
The stone's in the midst of all
Too long a sacrifice can make a stone of the heart. 34

In the midst of his longing for passion and beauty symbolised for him in the landed gentry he is brought face to face with reality. This shift from pulsating life to death is brought about by the words 'stone' and 'sacrifice'. Stone suggests coldness and sacrifice recalls the death of the leaders. It

34. Ibid., p. 204
shows that Yeats may have had some reservations about the terrible cost of political life. This aspect also has much in common with the typical conservative who also dislikes political militancy and violent change. Yet Yeats is aware of the importance of the event which was primarily a middle-class rising and for him they are redeemed by this passion which ennobles the event.

*We know their dream, enough*

*To know they dreamed and are dead.*

He exalts the emotional nationalism that Easter 1916 was a result of. He transforms the sacrifice from fact into fiction for the purpose of exaltation. But against this exuberance a note of sombreness is introduced in the opening lines 'Grey eighteenth century houses'. Yet the event transfigures ordinariness into something which has a hint of nobility because of the sacrifice. But the inner tension between the poet's public stance and private fears is suggested through the words 'stone' and 'sacrifice'. These are contrasted to bring out the difference between idealism and a certain inflexibility in Yeats's attitude towards the violence and cruelty, this idealism generates. The image of the stone suggests coldness and hardness indicating his conservative stance. The image of the stone is used primarily

35 Ibid.
as an indication of Yeats's reservations about the terrible cost of political life. The final note of the poem is therefore ambiguous - the tension is a result of Yeats's exaltation of the events in purely Irish terms as a patriotic Irishman, and his personal dislike of the violence that political events generate. There is a clash between the public and private nature of Yeats which adds to the poignancy of the poem. It is a classic example of his romantic conservative stance - his inclination for popular politics coupled with an aversion of the mob mentality and attitudes.

This basic ambivalence in his nature leads him to exalt Irish nationalism in purely patriotic poems such as "Sixteen Dead Men" and at the same time his conservatism is revealed in the other poems. "Sixteen Dead Men" is a poem of praise for the martyrs of 1916 and here there is a total commitment to the Irish cause. In "The Rose Tree" the rose image becomes explicitly political and Yeats seems to have borrowed this idea from Pearse who thought that bloodshed was necessary to redeem Ireland.

There is nothing but our own red blood
Can make a right rose tree. 36

"On a Political Prisoner" reveals the other side of his nature, his hatred of demagogy and abstract political

principles which subvert the individuality in a person, whereby the cause becomes more important.

Did she in touching that lone wing
Recall that years before her mind
Became a bitter, an abstract thing,
Her thought some popular enmity
Blind and leader of the blind
Drinking the foul ditch where they lie.\(^{37}\)

These lines indicate a harsh and unpleasant aspect that the revolution had ushered in. It has brought a certain hardiness and even harshness of attitude in people, in this poem Con Markiewicz in particular. In this poem the image of the bird describes the change which is brought about by external events. The nature imagery now explores the mind and mood of man whereas before it denoted certain general events and change. The rising has brought in pain and disillusionment and more than that a fatal ignorance. It also points to his conservative scorn of the crowd.

This sense of disorder coincided with the setting up of an independent republic which drew the British authorities into a confrontation with the new republic, and the country was soon torn by dissension. Yeats in his poem "The Second Coming" captures this anarchy and the state of

\(^{37}\) "On a Political Prisoner", p. 207
disorder but in this poem the theme of destruction embraces the whole of European civilization linking national crisis with international disaster.

Things fall apart, the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned. 38

Some critics have analysed Yeats's later poetic development as a change into a visionary and prophet-poet because of the universal themes brought in. But though there is this depiction of universal values in relation to art and philosophy what is more significant is its living context. His Irish background is inherent in his world view and this background is now primarily mirrored through his Anglo-Irish heritage. He is not a visionary poet, his poetry rests in the vital link with his Irish heritage. In "The Second Coming" this disintegration of society is primarily a reflection of Irish society. The major loss for him is the loss of innocence. It is seen on two levels, he is viewing Irish events as a social thinker and this loss of innocence is a reference to his own sense of loss, of this notion of innocence. His attitude to Irish politics has unleashed a critical, and sometimes despairing awareness of social

38. "The Second Coming", Collected Poems, p. 211
tension. In "A Prayer for my Doughter" this ceremony of innocence is now given a definite form. It is closely associated with custom and ceremony which are the major themes of the poem. The metaphors used from nature point to the gracefulness, naturalness and dignity that should go along with beauty. This theme is a recurring one in his poetry and is contrasted with the bitterness that Irish events evoke. Alongside this is the theme of violence which runs throughout Irish literature. This theme of violence is juxtaposed against art and civilization which is threatened by this urge for violent upheaval. A universal theme is pitted against a personal theme - his abhorence of violence. It is a paradoxical movement, on the one hand the subjects of most of his poems on art and civilization, violence and upheaval broaden into events which have universal significance, on the other hand the poet himself is aware of his need to define and assert his personality in specifically Irish and Protestant terms. In this sense his poetry remains essentially a poetry written out of a sense of commitment to his Irish background which he adopts to suit his romantic-conservative preferences. Even the apparently alien setting of "Sailing to Byzantium" in "The Tower" echoes it because one feels the variety and vitality of the 'Salmon falls' (In Irish literature the salmon is a symbol of strength and vitality). 'Mackerel crowded seas', 'fish', 'flesh' and 'fowl' suggest the fertility and vitality of the Irish countryside. Thus the images of violence which are expressed
in universal images and themes are contrasted with images of vitality based on Irish tradition.

Here Yeats is at his romantic best because he sees an inherent vitality in nature which represents one form of longing - his desire for youth in the midst of his regret for age and losing strength. This in turn leads to the poet wanting something which is ageless and therefore permanent and which is not subject to the pain of birth and death.

"Sailing to Byzantium" represents one form of longing. It is of great significance that he finds the ideal embodied in a past culture, in this case Byzantium which represents for him an ideal union of art and culture, emotion and thought, romantic and conservative in nature. This ideal is set in contrast to Ireland represented by living and youth and the salmon imagery. Byzantium is an embodiment of an ideal, which is set over against Ireland which has its own vitality and traditions.

In "The Tower" this symbol for living is set in a concrete image. It is significant and paradoxical that he uses the tower, a symbol of bygone days, to represent and define his own standards. It is appropriate that he uses the symbol of the tower with its associations with the aristocracy to help bring out his own perspectives. It is a public manifestation of his desires. He aligns himself to the arrogance of the Protestant tradition before the rise of the
new nationalism. It is primarily used as a romantic emblem to express a conservative ideal.

I declare
They shall inherit my pride,
The pride of people that were
Bound neither to Cause nor to State,
Neither to slaves that were spat on,
Nor to the tyrant that spat
The people of Burke and of Grattan.39

Similarly the symbol of the swan is connected in his poetry to the aristocracy and in this poem it becomes specifically symbolic of the last wave of the Protestant Ascendancy power and domination.

When the swan must fix his eye
Upon a fading gleam,
Float out upon a long
Last reach of glittering stream
And there sing his last song.40

In "Meditations in Times of Civil War" images of violence are juxtaposed with images of peace with the focus on the loss of the 'fine life'. The 'Meditations' are provoked by the Big

40. Ibid., p. 223
House Protestant tradition because of the civil war which had torn Ireland into two - friend against friend - religion and politics seemed impossible.

The image of the house is explicitly connected with the aristocratic tradition. In "Ancestral Houses" the mood of contemplation is connected with the abundance and fertility of life but 'the abounding glittering jet' relates to creativity which has both violence and bitterness. He accepts the violence of his times as tragically inevitable, but longs always for sweetness and ceremony. The whole thrust of the poems moves between these two contraries.

Some violent bitter man, some powerful man
Called architect and artisan, that they,
Bitter and violent men, might rear in stone
The sweetness that all longed for night and day. 41

In the concluding stanza the glory of art is juxtaposed with bitterness and violence. What is noteworthy is that these are associated not with art alone but with aristocracy.

What of the glory of escutcheoned doors,
And buildings that a haughtier age designed,
The pacing to and fro on polished floors
Amid great chambers and long galleries, lined

---

With famous portraits of our ancestors;
What if those things the greatest of mankind
Consider most to magnify, or to bless,
But take our greatness with our bitterness?**2

Yeats brings out his love for the aristocracy by the skilful use of adjectives which suggest nobility, for example, 'glory', 'escutcheoned', 'haughtier', 'polished', 'great' and 'famous'. There is a semantic and mental link between art and aristocracy.

In his poetry written at this stage we are conscious of the focus in these poems on his social and political background which covers all aspects of his art and thought. The generalizing tone is absent, the images are clear and lucid and are most clearly defined. This pictorial quality of his later poetry serves to heighten the horrifying images of the Civil War against images of peace. In "My House" the rose symbol, used often in mystical and national contexts now assumes a homelier aspect. National causes now become closely identified with a personal note, bringing out Yeats's own commitment and a sense of responsibility to the Irish civil war - he is a participant in the horrors that the civil war unleashed.

42. Ibid., p. 226
We had fed the heart on fantasies
The Heart's grown brutal from the fare
More substance in our enmities
Than in our love. 43

These lines seem to stress the fact that the Civil War, though a result of Irish nationalism and Easter 1916 have ushered a new mood of insensitivity. It has released violence and a bitterness. Above all it is destructive and sterile. It has changed Yeats. His own response has matured and hardened illustrating conservatism. Thus the mood is not static but changing, there is an interplay between public event and personal response.

In "1919" the same theme of violence is presented. The first three stanzas present a world that is untouched by violence, a golden age for creativity in the arts. The third stanza shows Yeats's mastery over balance as it presents a balance between the opening mood and the mood of the following stanza. The reference to an inactive army is in sharp contrast to the vivid days of the civil war. Moreover what is striking is that this senseless violence and brutality is also a challenge to his love of order and peace.

Now days are dragon ridden, the nightmare
Rides upon sleep; a drunken soldiery

Can leave the mother, murdered at her door,
To crawl in her own blood, and go scot-free;
The night can sweat with terror as before
We pieced our thoughts into philosophy,
And planned to bring the world under a rule.\textsuperscript{44}

What is to be noted is the ominous rhythm. Later in the poem
the animal imagery evokes the attitude of the Irish public
and this shows Yeats at his best in his role as poet and as
a man directly involved in the situation.

\textit{We, who seven years ago}

Talked of honour and of truth,
Shriek with pleasure if we show
The weasel's twist, the weasel's tooth.\textsuperscript{45}

His poetry gains in intensity because of this profound
awareness of social issues. The poetry is the result of his
social commitments. It is only because of his wider human
concerns he is able to view it in a proper perspective. It
does not limit his poetry even though there is a narrowing
down of focus. It gains in its social and political
relevance. Thus all his poetry in this later phase is
enriched by its heightened social awareness. The earlier

\textsuperscript{44} "1919", \textit{Collected Poems}, p. 233
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., p. 233
tension between nationalism and the Anglo-Irish heritage moves from a conscious and deliberate assumption of a mask, to an analysis of the cultural contexts of nationalism. This phase of nationalism was drawn in contrast to the middle class ideology and sentiments. "Easter 1916" stands at the crossroads of an emotional and romantic nationalism and a nationalism that becomes clearly defined within an Anglo-Irish milieu. Change and conflict lie at the heart of Yeats's poetry and "Responsibilities" marks the transitional phase. His later poetry is a poetry of resolution, which puts in a proper perspective his nationalistic ideals. Nationalism is seen from within his own milieu, and thus he is able, with greater maturity, to attack colonialism and British imperialism. The tone is sharper. He is also able to view nationalism against themes of universal significance. These universal themes do not suggest a widening of attitude, nor are they based on visionary politics. Rather they are enriched by the Irish setting and images. He is using contrast to amplify his own nationalistic ideals.

This is seen in his use of the theme of violence, for example, in "Leda and the Swan" in which the rise and fall of Troy is described but as Yeats says the politics behind it is hinted at and the poem as a result, is more a series of evocative imagery which suggests the energy and creativity in history. But three images in the poem remind one of the fact that there is a certain pictorial and
descriptive likeness to the images used to describe the Irish civil war.

The broken wall, the burning roof and tower.  

These images bring to mind the theme of ruin in Irish poetry and most often a tower or ruin illustrates the barrenness of the landscape. In Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* the house in certain portions is in ruin illustrating the ruin and decay of the nobility, similarly in Yeats's tower and its ruin exemplify this same sense of decay of the Ascendancy. This barrenness that Yeats found in political life after the civil war led him to seek an ideal society and this he found in the Protestant Ascendancy in the time of Swift, Burke and Goldsmith. At this point his poetry celebrates Irish nationalistic ideals in a Protestant context — in Burke, Goldsmith and Swift whom he upholds as the founders of modern Ireland. It is a romantic ideal.

In "The Winding Stair and Other Poems" (1933) the opening poem "In Memory of Eva Gare-Booth and Con Markievicz" the theme of the Big House Ascendancy is developed. "Silk Kimonoes" add to the image of delicacy and graciousness associated with the Georgian mansion and it also evokes the classical aristocratic culture of the Far East. Here the theme of time is measured in terms of beauty and the effect

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46. "Leda and the Swan", *Collected Poems*, p. 72
that politics has on that beauty. In "Death" the death of Kevin O'Higgins links politics with Yeats's concept of heroism and courage. This is further illustrated in "A Dialogue of Self and Soul" where Sato's sword, a symbol for heroism and courage is also a symbol of life. It is a conscious aligning to an aristocratic ideal. This ideal is combined with a lust for living and a life of action in "Blood and the Moon" which expressed Yeats's admiration for eighteenth century Ireland personalized in the figures of Bishop Berkeley, Burke, Goldsmith and Dean Swift. They point to the Protestant ethos in his poetry and thought. He identifies himself with each of them in the sense that they represent for him all that is best in culture. In this poem the tower is seen very closely associated with the Anglo-Irish Protestant tradition. Yet the symbol of the tower seems to become a symbol of the modern state which Berkeley had helped to found. But the state itself has the 'odour of blood' implying that violence is necessary in history though Yeats is disapproving of this fact. Even the moon, a symbol of innocence and perfection, is a witness to this destruction. Moreover corruption lies in the modern state too.

Is every modern nation like the tower
Half dead at the top.47

47. W.B. Yeats, "Blood and the Moon", p. 269
This symbol of a ruined tower has a duality of vision because it looks back to the Protestant tradition of the Ascendancy decaying in the face of modern Ireland and it looks forward to the new state which also carry its seeds of destructive energy.

In "The Seven Sages" this tradition of the Protestant Ascendancy is celebrated. In this poem Yeats is searching for his ancestry, whom, he believes have much in common with the founders of Irish political thought, all of whom denounced "whiggery". It also elaborates on his aristocratic and romantic ideal - 'the dream of the noble and beggar man'. Implicit in this ideal is an attack on the nationalism of the new 'levelling' democratic consciousness of the middle class. This dream of the noble and beggar man, both the figures alien to a democratic society, is connected with the Protestant tradition in literature and politics. This dream centres around "Coole Park" and this poem "Coole Park 1929" is the culmination of centuries of ideas and emotions. There is a cultural and social dimension in the poem. Time seems to be captured in the trees planted by the owners. Passion and thought are central to his image of the 'Big House'. Nature seems to illustrate the social ideal. Thus the swallows and the trees are emblematic of the poet and his craft which is social in its focus, and permanent.
They came like swallows and like swallows went,
And yet a woman's powerful character
Could keep a swallow to its first intent;
And half a dozen in formation there,
That seemed to whirl upon a compass-point,
Found certainty upon the dreaming air,
The intellectual sweetness of these lines
That cut through time or cross it withershins.  

"Coole Park and Ballylee 1931" is an elegy mourning the loss of the tradition of the "Big House" which is now associated with the romantic in literature. This tradition is exemplified in the central image of the swan and the rider.

What is significant is that the nature imagery is directly related to the social focus in his poetry. The first three stanzas deal with the images of nature. The image of water and the animal seem to suggest a communion between the animal world and the world of nature. But that is not enough for Yeats. He relates it to man himself.

What's water but the generated soul?

In the second stanza the image of the wood suggests the coming barrenness of the aristocratic tradition because of the lack of a creative atmosphere. The bundle of sticks

under the 'wintry sun' suggest this and is related to Yeats's use of the bundle of twigs image to denote a lack of creativity. 'Glittering' and 'flooded lake' seem to suggest a certain wildness in the water image which cannot be controlled by man, meaning that passion in our hearts sometimes cannot be controlled by thoughts alone. But this movement is controlled or rationalized by his use of the image of the 'spot of ink'. This levels down the mysterious elements, making it homelier. Moreover it is a link between the first and last three stanzas, because the last three stanzas move inward and deal with the concrete, the image of the 'Big House'. It is a semantic link — ink, books, pictures, room which sets off the association of ideas which are interlinked in this poem.

Old marble heads, old pictures everywhere;
Great rooms where travelled men and children found content or joy. 49

A spot whereon the founders lived and died
Seemed once more dear than life; ancestral trees,
Or garden's rich in memory glorified
Marriages, alliances and families,
And every bride's ambition satisfied. 50

49. W.B. Yeats, "Coole Park and Ballylee", Collected Poems, p. 276
50. Ibid., p. 276
This celebration of the 'fine life' is connected in the last stanza with his poetic intentions, the theme of 'traditional sanctity and loneliness'. But the last two lines bring in loneliness and uncertainty about the future.

But all is changed, that high horse riderless,
Though mounted in that saddle Homer rode
Where the swan drifts upon a darkening flood. 51

The horse and the swan, symbols of the aristocracy are placed in a time in which uncertainty and fear lingers. The word "drift" suggests that their anchor, the "Big House" is removed and they are adrift on the modern tide of democratic trends that has enveloped modern Irish society. "Darkening flood" seems to bring out Yeats's reservation about the new democratic consciousness and his own romantic conservative nature which binds him to a tradition which is fast dying out. In this poem his social and political ideas unite with his literary intent contributing to the success of the poem.

More and more his poems turn upon his social and political ideas. In "Swift's Epitaph" Swift is the model in his fight for human liberty. 'Imitate him if you dare" seems to point to the middle class who out of cowardice or their shackles to the Church prevent them from doing deeds in the name of human liberty.

51. Ibid., p. 276
In "Remorse for Intemperate Speech" his social and political ideas seem transformed into one generalising statement - that of the passion and love of Ireland that overwhelmed him.

Out of Ireland have we come
Great hatred, little room
Maimed us from the start
I carry from my mother's womb
A fanatic heart.52

What is important here is that he shows an objective self-awareness in these lines that transcends his conservative dogmatism. The artist's pity overcomes political prejudices. This affirmation of feeling is also captured in "Words for Music Perhaps" where there is the same lyrical celebration that does not ignore the waste and the pain but rises above it in an exuberance of love. There is a sense of abandonment and gaiety which is linked to idealism and heroism.

I am of Ireland
And the Holy Land of Ireland
And time runs, cried she
Come out of charity
Come dance with me in Ireland.53

52. "Remorse for Intemperate Speech", Collected Poems, p. 288
53. "I am of Ireland", Collected Poems, p. 304
In this volume of poems the theme of time is seen through Crazy Jone, and her conversations are moments captured in time and bring an earthy wisdom, born of experience in contrast to the "Byzantium" which recalls time captured through art, culture and civilization.

This earthy wisdom is rooted in the Irish background and this wisdom is reflected in the plays written during this period. Earlier The Dreaming of the Bones had portrayed nationalism in a philosophical context. In A Full Moon in March (1935) the theme centres and reflects a reversal of values which develops around the story of the swineherd and the queen. It can also be interpreted as the incomplete union between the old landed gentry and the new middle class. It is an unnatural union.

O what innkeepers daughter
Shared the Byzantine crown?
Girls that have governed cities,
Or horned great cities down
Have bedded with their fancy man
Whether king or clown.\(^{54}\)

aristocratic tradition of "The Winding Stain and Other Poems" (1933). This theme of ruin is seen in terms of the love between Stella and Swift which he rejects. The ideal that the play projects is that of human liberty. Swift lived in an age of elegance and magnificence but he foresaw the ruin that was to come because of the spread of democratic ideas. This ideal society was essentially aristocratic and through this play Yeats projects some of his ideas—his notion of Ireland in the eighteenth century, his hatred of democracy and love of old houses. This theme is again expanded in *Purgatory* and *King of the Great Clock Tower*. We must keep in mind that for Yeats, love of woman was linked with their background, their tradition of nobility and grace. The notion that the common man leads the queen to ruin and destruction seem to signify the idea of the middle class tearing Parnell down thus uniting Parnell and the Cuchulain image. The common factor in all is the love of woman which brings their ruin and destruction. This idea of the "fatal woman" is a typically romantic attitude.55

In "Parnell's Funeral" he returns to praise for Parnell. He compares Parnell's genius to the brightness of a star and suggests that Parnell is a sacrifice in a ritual. The tone in the poem is bitter and denounces the politics of

55. This idea is mentioned in Marie Praz *The Romantic Agony* in "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" (London: Oxford University Press, 1970, 2nd edition), pp. 190-300
expediency of the Irish who went against Parnell. The whole poem is a protest against the democratic forces in the modern state which brings in disorder.

The same idea as in "Blood and the Moon" of a state not having the correct leadership is also contained in this poem.

When nations are empty there at the top
When order has weakened or faction is strong. 56

Yeats was convinced that the mob was the order of the day. In "Church and State" he severs all connections with the mob.

Might of the Church and state
Their mobs put under their feet. 57

Yeats is here deriding political and religious fanaticism, and again the Church indicates the Roman Catholic clergy because of the reference to the "heart's wine" and "mind's bread" which will turn 'sour' and the 'wine run thick'. This refers to the increasing clerical influence upon government matters after the establishment of the Free State.

For Yeats this was a sign of the control by the mob and as he grows older he despairs more and more of democracy. Nor does he find a fulfilling substitute in any other extant

56. "Three Songs to the Same Tune" Collected Poems, p. 323
57. "Church and State" Collected Poems, p. 327
social order. Hence his role becomes that of a tragic witness. This is linked to the theme of violence and ruin which is the central image in the last plays and poems. In Purgatory it is explicitly connected with the Protestant aristocracy. The earlier theme of A Full Moon in March and King of the Great Clock Tower finds full expression in Purgatory. What was suggested in The Words Upon the Window Pane is now at its most intense. In a sense it is a culmination of his social and political ideas like "Last Poems". The themes of ruin and violence is interwoven into the background of the Ascendancy. The symbol of the tree seems to echo the symbol of the house. Both are now bare remnants of a past which was once rich and satisfying.

I saw it fifty years ago
Before the thunderbolt had riven it,
Green leaves, ripe leaves, leaves thick as butter,
Fat greasy life.\[58\]

There is a suggestion of over-ripeness in the image which perhaps points to the rampant decadence in the aristocracy. The boy takes up the image of the ruined house which is explicit of the dying nobility. The image of the ruined tower finds echoes in Edgeworth and in modern writers like O’Faolain and in Yeats.

\[58. \textit{Purgatory} (1939), \textit{Collected Plays}, p. 682\]
The floor is gone, the windows gone, 
And where there should be roof there's sky, 
And here's a bit of an egg-shell thrown 
Out of a jackdaw's nest. 59

This mood of nostalgia finds full expression in the "Last Poems" (1936-39). Here nationalism is expressed in satiric lyrics denouncing British imperialism, and in the poems on art and culture. He is fusing artistic and political experience into one unifying mood - that of nostalgia pitted against remorse. This mood of remorse and nostalgia is interwoven with politics and philosophy. But somehow there is no sense of strain between them. This volume is remarkable for its range and depth of mood. It brings together all the elements in his work with a striking vitality and vigour. Overlying all these moods is the fact that here his political poetry seems at once political and philosophical, gay and tragic, bitter and repentant, absurd and fanatic. It is a celebration of the triumph of the noble and the beggar man, of saint and fool, Crazy Gore and Ribh.

Through this image of Ireland Yeats is expressing his social concerns. This is to be stressed as most critics consider that his concerns do not reflect the social and

59. Ibid., p. 682
moral concerns of the age and is a mark of his minority psychology and stress only his romantic tendencies. But that is to probe the surface only. His poetry does reflect a Protestant Anglo-Irish milieu but it gains in moral and social significance when we consider it in the light of his views on nationalism. For Yeats nationalism was an all-embracing word and he uses it to focus on issues which do have relevance to his society and age. His view of history is related to this concept of nationalism, the endless turning and circling movements of history is captured in images which have historical and social significance. In "The Gyres' Old Rocky Face" stands for permanence in a world of fluctuating values. Thus he clings to his Irish heritage to establish some control over movements in society which he feels is moving away from him expressed in the modern democratic consciousness. Thus Ireland is a standard he has, a refuge from where he can comment on events which have both romantic and conservative connotations. Ireland is linked to his poetic process and to Yeats's social awareness in an Anglo-Irish milieu. His concept of Irish nationalism leads Yeats to become increasingly vociferous in his attacks upon the English. In "The Curse of Cromwell" he writes of his love of the aristocracy and an attack upon Cromwell who is seen as a figure destroying the nobility. Thus Cromwell is associated with nationalism and even communism "a levelling creed" as is evident in his letter to Dorothy Wellesley.
At this moment I am expressing my rage against the intelligentsia by writing about Oliver Cromwell who was the Lenin of his day — I speak through the mouth of some wandering poet in Ireland.  

There is also a reference to the middle class symbolised by money and the need for getting on in the world.

All neighbourly content and easy talk are gone
But there's no good complaining, for money's rant is on
He that's mounting up must on his neighbour mount.  

There is an ironic connotation in the word 'mount' which is usually associated with horses, symbolising the aristocracy. Here it is ironically used to debunk the pushing nature of the middle class. The last stanza brings in the image of the house associated with the theme of ruin.

Alongside this theme of ruin is Yeats asserting his Irishness by contrasting it with British colonialism. In these ballads 'Roger Casement' and 'The Ghost of Roger Casement' there is a savage mockery in rhythm and language. The concrete specifications and the parallels used are another instance of Yeats's use of Irish idiom. In this instance there is a parallel drawn between John Bull standing

61. 'The Curse of Cromwell', Collected Poems, p. 350
for England and tyranny and oppression and Roger Casement standing for the oppressed.

John Bull has stood for Parliament
A dog must have his day,
The country thinks no end of him
For he knows how to say
At a vicereign feast or a banquet
That all must hung their trust
Upon the British Empire
Upon the Church of Christ
The ghost of Roger Casement
Is beating on the door. 62

The ballad refrain is used to underline the political theme in which the smug platitudes of John Bull are disturbed by Casement's life and example. In 'The O'Rahilly' the refrain 'How goes the weather' is used in an euphemistic sense. It has wider connotations than just the political overtones. It assumes a social and cultural responsibility. The notion of blood sacrifice relates this political ballad directly with the political ballads of the nineteenth century Young Irelanders. It looks back to Easter nineteen sixteen which connects this notion of blood sacrifice and passion and heroism and is distinctively similar to the Young Ireland

ballads. In 'Come Gather Round me Parnellites' he returns to Parnell and the poem is addressed to the supporters of Parnell, who remained with him after the O'Shea divorce case and the split in Irish politics.

He fought the might of England
And saved the Irish poor.  

In "The Wild Old Wicked Man" the refrain rests on an obvious parallel, another example from Anglo-Irish idiom.

Daybreak and a candle-end.  

It carries the basic theme of lust and old age, youth and old age, daybreak suggesting the beginning of dawn and the promise of youth and passion whereas "candle end" suggests old age, and the end of fulfilment. Yet this is contrasted with the mood in the poem itself which upholds passion and old age. This contrast creates the tension in the poem.

That some stream of lightening
From the old man in the skies
Can burn out that suffering
No right-taught man denies.
But a coarse old man am I,
I choose the second-best

63. W.B. Yeats "Come Gather Round me Parnellites", p. 355
64. "The Wild Old Wicked Man", p. 356
I forget it all awile
Upon a woman's breast
Daybreak and a candle end. 65

"Colonel Martin" achieves a dramatic quality and narrative technique comparable with the best of Irish street ballads. In "The Old Stone Cross", "The Spirit Medium" and "Those Images" there is a conflict between poetry and politics, illusion and reality, art and the imagination and the actual world of events. In "The Spirit Medium" there seems to be a reconciliation between the two. The refrain brings to mind that the world of actual events is necessary for artistic validity.

I bend my body to the spade
Or grope with a dirty hand. 66

This is resolved in "The Municipal Gallery Revisited" which is an explicit and fitting tribute to all who have contributed in some way to Ireland's history. But it is not just a record of history, it is the poet's moving tribute to all his friends. It is a fusion of the reality of revolutionary Ireland and Ireland 'Terrible and gay' imagined by the poets. The first stanza tells us of Casement, Griffith and O'Higgins who bring in the revolutionary. The latter half of the poem brings in

Yeats's friendship with John Synge and Lady Gregory who through their works have made possible the 'dream of the noble and beggar man'. In a sense the poem is a balance between violence through which independence is achieved and literature a non-violent means of unifying Ireland. It illustrates the romantic-conservative ideal.

In "Three Songs to the One Burden" the refrain "From mountain to mountain ride the fierce horsemen" recall the aristocracy who are now overwhelmed by the new commonness. The notion of blood sacrifice is brought in recalling "Easter 1916" bringing in the notion that the mob do have moments of glory. This moment of glory is recaptured in "The Statues". "There is complexity of thought which unites Eastern philosophy and the gift of Pythagoras. It is an attempt to discover in Ireland a heroic civilization which most upholds the aesthetic ideals and intellectual force as well as skills of numbering and measuring so that the Irish can fall back upon Pythagora's philosophy where perfection is the keynote.

When Pearse summoned to his side,
What stalked through the Post Office? What intellect,
What calculation, number, measurement replied?
We Irish, born into that ancient sect
But thrown up on this filthy modern tide. 67

67. "The Statues", pp. 375-76
In "Three Marching Songs" the theme of time again is the keynote of the poem. The refrain changes in the three songs. In the second song the refrain refers to the supernatural element in the Irish fairy lore. The word "airy" is often used in Irish dialect in Galway and Sligo and usually means "eerie" (Yeats). The first refrain brings in the theme of time, the second the supernatural, while the third is a mocking gesture of defiance of the old man hanged. In "Hound Voice" the harsh strident note of the Ballads is toned down and returns to his love of the tradition of the Ascendancy. "Hound" recalls the hunt, evocative of the life of leisure lived by the nobility. Yet the image of blood is still a dominant feature, moreover 'hounds' may have a dual meaning recalling the hunt in "Parnell's Funeral". The words used suggest this duality of vision.

But popular rage,

Hysterica passio dragged this quarry down. 68

The word "Quarry" suggests the hunt and in "Hound Voice" may be related to Parnell, a member of the landed gentry once leading the hounds, now becoming the victim himself 'the quarry'.

Some day we shall get up before the dawn

And find our ancient hounds before the door,

68. "Parnell's Funeral", p. 319, "A Full Moon in March"
And wide awake know that the hunt is on;
Stumbling upon the blood-dark track once more,
Then cleaning out and bandaging of wounds,
And chants of victory amid the encircling hounds. 69

"High Talk" and "The Circus Animal's Desertion" are closely connected with Yeats's poetic technique. Yet the last image is concerned with stripping away all ornament, but it also suggests his contact with events which have motivated his art and imagination.

Now that my ladder's gone,
I must lie down where all the ladders start,
In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart. 70

It connects with his 'fanatic heart', his private desires and longings are not separate from the passion that move the Irish-passion and truth ennoble Irish events in his poetry. In 'Under Ben Bulben', the supernatural meets the real and is caught up in the frozen image of the horseman. He speaks to other Irish poets as an Irishman.

Sing the peasantry, and then
Hard-riding country gentlemen. 71

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71. W.B. Yeats, 'Under Ben Bulben', Collected Poems, p. 400
Bringing to a fitting conclusion his dream of the noble and the peasant.

Sing the lords and ladies gay
That were beaten into the clay.\footnote{Ibid., p. 400}

This image looks back to "The Curse of Cromwell". His poems represent for him a refuge of art, nobility and the 'fine life' and this can be traced to his love of tradition and order. But these poems derive their strength and life from their profound awareness of the forces of real social life, the raw passions, the violence and the glory and squalor.

Thus the political poems of Yeats deal with political themes which are so intricately interwoven into the texture of the poem that the tone is rarely that of a harangue. His poems move from an Ireland ideal and idealized in his earlier poetry to an Ireland in the later poetry at once topical and transcendent. It is a poetry increasingly complex. It reflects a mature mind aware of the fundamental problems of life but not attracted to facile solutions. It is this attitude of Yeats to Ireland, often critical, sometimes admiring, yet always involved, that gives to his poetry its intensity of feeling and complexity of thought. Even those poems that are not directly concerned with the...
fate of Ireland somehow incorporate the vicissitudes and tragic wisdom of Yeats's Irish experience.