One is constantly reminded of the fact that Yeats was one of the great modern masters whose importance and interest are assured for all time. Yet in a general study of Yeats as a poet very little emphasis is given to his Irish background and to his political thought. Most often concentration is reserved for his art and philosophy. For new readers of Yeats and particularly for foreign students Irish events are hazy and the references to them in standard works are of interest only to the specialized reader. But the relationship is certainly deeper than that between an actor and the stage-setting. However, an Indian scholar like me, who has moreover only a limited knowledge of Irish history and culture, cannot pretend to a profound understanding of Yeats's Irish roots. Though I have tried hard to read all the available critical works on Yeats, I may have missed some significant recent works. I can only excuse myself with the plea that from the place where I work it is difficult to come by the latest additions to the library of critical works on Yeats.

One of the main aims of this thesis is to supply a general background to his work, his social milieu with special emphasis on the relationship between his poetry and his social and political thought. A knowledge of historical and social background is imperative for the correct understanding of any work of art because of the vital link
between literature and life. Thus background studies serve as a useful and interesting supplement to the main analysis of his poetry and thought. An attempt has been made here to show Yeats's close connections with his Anglo-Irish heritage lying beneath his public gestures and pronouncements, and his anguished yearning for uniting Catholic and Protestant Ireland. Other scholars who have commented on his Irish heritage do not notice this struggle. He was aware of the diversity of the Irish experience and heritage and this is reflected in his work, yet one feels that he remains an Anglo-Irish poet in terms of his language and his social and political ideas. Comparative studies are attempted here to draw out the similarities and differences with other Irish writers. Yet Yeats's background is necessarily wider than a parochial Anglo-Irish environment. Through his reading and personal contacts he also came under the influence of other schools of thought and other traditions. His Irish roots made him sympathetic to mysticism. But he also took a great deal of interest in modern conservative and totalitarian ideologies. It was again his Anglo-Irish heritage that saved him from succumbing completely to Fascism. To gain a proper perspective on Yeats's views a general historical and social background of international events is also indispensable, since it brings out Yeats's reaction to other contemporary political, social and literary forces. Thus this work presents two important levels of analysis which though it has received due attention
has not been systematically combined in one work. Firstly, Yeats is presented as an Anglo-Irish writer of distinction writing within his own cultural and historical framework and assimilating and absorbing features to be found in traditional and ancient Irish literature and adapting it to his own needs in a new synthesis between the Celtic heritage and the Anglo-Irish milieu. Yeats’s work serves the dual purpose of illustrating his own development as a poet and thinker as an Irish poet receptive to the diverse trends within Irish society. It also represents his work in terms of a modern poet writing and responding to global trends and currents of thought whether social or political. Yeats’s commitment as a modern poet meant being receptive to events that were part of the milieu that nurtured his poetry. Comparisons and similarities between other poets and their world view bring out Yeats’s own unique and intensely personal view of life. The thesis attempts to show that the close interrelationship between his poetry and thought is a result of his romantic-conservative ideology which evolves through the interaction between his temperament and events. It is a blend of old-fashioned courtesy and passion, a love of traditional nobility and elegance and a highly individual view of liberty and other values which were in startling contrast to both modern democratic and totalitarian ideologies.

The main attempt of this study is to give a critical account of Yeats’s confrontation with Irish and international
events in the light of his romantic conservative ideology. This is expressed in terms of his language, poetry, art and thought. It is the sum total of a personality which wavered between old-fashioned values, complemented by an interest in mysticism and theosophy, a love of liberty and an attachment to humanist ideals. It is an attempt to explain and synthesize the contrary facets of his personality. While some of the facets appear to be in conflict with other facets, actually in his personality and poetry they combined into a unique harmony.

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