"In dreams begin responsibility."

For a fuller understanding of Yeats's poetry it is essential that a study of his social milieu be undertaken. For any poet, and particularly for a poet with a background like that of Yeats, there is always a brisk interaction between the poet and his age. This interaction leads to an extraordinary fusion of thought and feeling which is sometimes the direct result of contemporary events, though it is also informed by the tradition he inherits. The artistic temper of the writer is an important factor in his poetic response to the outside world. In the case of Yeats his social and political ideas are an inherent part of his poetry and thought.

There are numerous works on his art and his philosophical ideas as well as many standard biographical works. There has been some work on his political beliefs as well. In general all the works mention his political beliefs in relation to his art and philosophy. Specific books which analyse his political thought are A. Norman Jeffares's Yeats: Man and Poet, T.R. Henn's The Lonely Tower: Studies in the Poetry of W.B. Yeats and A.G. Stock's W.B. Yeats His Poetry and Thought. The last two authors begin their works with a brief analysis of the Irish background, whereas A. Norman Jeffares incorporates the Irish background in his
Commentary on the Collected Poems which gives a brief historical background to every poem. Elizabeth Cullingford's *Yeats, Ireland and Fascism* is the first full length detailed analysis of his social and political beliefs. But the paradox at the heart of his beliefs, that it is a conservatism of a peculiarly romantic cast has not received attention. Conor Cruise O'Brien's article "Passion and Cunning: The Politics of W.B. Yeats" traces his conservatism against the background of fascism but fails to take into consideration the fact that Yeats's individualism could not withstand the tendencies of a fascist state nor the fact that his support of the working classes in the Dublin Lock Out of 1913 stemmed from his love of individual liberty and was both a humane gesture arising out of his romantic impulses and a conservative reaction to industrial middle-classes. Donald T Torchiania's *Yeats and Georgian Ireland* traces Yeats's conservatism to the eighteenth century Ireland of Burke, Berkeley, Swift and Goldsmith but does not include the widespread rise of conservatism among writers in the nineteen thirties who sought to curb democratic liberalism which they felt had failed them. In poetry, which is not under the tyranny of reason, the paradox is all the more evident.

Herein lies his success as a poet - he is able to view contemporary events with compassion and accuracy and as part of a system of values which would have validity for him in a changing society and is part of a transformation in the poet himself. It is part of the artistic process and, more
important, the poet himself undergoes a change, as he is part of events himself and feels responsible. For the Romantic poet this task has an individualistic complexion, but for Yeats this task is rooted in a system of values which is personal and yet in part the result of the intermixture of many different traditions. It is our belief that a study of the nature of his social and political thought, its romantic-conservative bias, is necessary to an understanding of the poet and the man. It explains his interest in the Irish background, and his relation to other Irish writers, the points of similarity and differences. His thought is also examined in relation to the social and intellectual background of his age and his conservatism is analysed in relation to other writers who professed a conservative outlook. Elizabeth Cullingford's book examines his political beliefs but does not probe the reasons why Yeats and some of the other modern writers were attracted to authoritarian political philosophies. In our study of Yeats as a political thinker two main levels of analysis are presented. Firstly, Yeats's development as a poet and thinker is described in relation to his Irish background. Moreover his similarities and differences with his contemporaries serve to bring out his own unique vision of life. Secondly, this unique vision of life is compared and contrasted with the similar outlook of other modern masters against the political, social and intellectual developments in Great Britain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Between these two there is interaction and development and this is examined in terms of his poetry and
The second chapter is devoted to this Irish background. An account is given of Irish Society, Life and Culture in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries. Life in Ireland was still dominated by religious divisions and it is against these separatist elements in Irish society that Yeats was trying to mould his experiences and uphold the ideal of a unified Irish culture. For this purpose Yeats looked to the older Celtic heritage, and the contradiction it led to between the still English-dominated Protestant Ascendancy and a nascent Irish national consciousness is brought out. Against this background Irish life is described with the effect that politics and the Industrial Revolution had on Irish society. At the heart of this ferment, whether it be literary or political or economic, is the influence of the Church. On the one hand there was the Church of Ireland, and on the other there was the Roman Catholic Church, the church of the majority, which tended to influence events with its rigidly reactionary and conservative attitude.

Section II of Chapter 2 gives an account of the Irish Literary Revival which was a landmark in Irish cultural history. Its political background, its origins and its development is analysed. It was a conscious attempt to revive Gàelic culture and form a union between the older Celtic heritage and the Ascendancy culture. The foundation of the Abbey Theatre, Yeats's role in it, its origins, its successes and controversies are described.
Yeats's position in Irish life — that of poet and critic, and later of a Senator, was always that of a man trying to bring about a unity in culture. Yeats's commitment to society is two-fold — that of a public man of affairs and a poet and a patriotic Irishman. But this dualism rests on the tension between his Romantic thoughts and conservative preferences. By temperament Yeats was a romantic. He had a romantic admiration for the past and for the old ideals of chivalry and nobility. But there is also a social reason for his views. His life coincided with a revolutionary period in Ireland. Irish nationalism not only became more powerful but succeeded in winning independence after a protracted struggle. This nationalism was mainly the ideology of the new Irish middle class. While Yeats loved and admired the Irish peasantry and the old Protestant nobility, he recoiled from the Irish middle class. He was repelled by their narrow outlook, lack of culture, individualism and worship of money. Yet it was they who led the revolutionary upsurge in Ireland. The revolutionary upsurge inspired the expansive and dynamic urge of his mind. He became active in organizing and promoting a new cultural Renaissance. He became actively interested in politics. But the narrow-minded and bigoted reaction of the middle class to the plays at the Abbey Theatre confirmed him in his belief that the people's judgement cannot be trusted, that democracy is not sound. Yet the Irish revolution was a democratic revolution. Hence he was forced to seek examples of his ideals of social order in the past. His association with the aristocracy and their culture of the
'Big House' also attracted him to Aristocracy. He denounced "Whiggery", democratic individualism and rationalism.

In Chapter Three "Yeats and his Circles" mention is made of this steady development of Yeats's inclination towards an aristocratic and anti-rational culture which for him was not only a matter of manners but represented the best in art, culture and language. This development moved in many directions and in diverse fields such as the occult, his literary and political aims. But through it all there is a conscious aim to develop a unity based on an aristocratic order. It also examines Yeats's position and development as an Irish and a modern poet writing in the tradition of English and continental systems of thought. These facets of his personality is embodied in the various interests of Yeats and his friends whom he drew around himself. This propensity to coterie and literary circles were an important feature of Dublin life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In fact Ireland produced brilliant conversationalists - Shaw, Wilde, J.B. Yeats and Yeats himself. It was a feature of the intellectual ferment that was part of Irish nationalism. People had many interests. Yeats had resolutely turned his back on the "levelling mind" and sought refuge in mysticism. Yeats was attracted to the Theosophists and Madame Blavatsky, MacGregor Mathers and the Christian Cabbalists. He was also attracted to Eastern philosophy. It was also a peculiarly Irish trait which leaned towards supernaturalism and magic because of the tradition of fairy lore and folk beliefs in
Ireland.

One of the fundamental questions is why Yeats and other Irish writers had such an abiding interest in the occult and what they found in it. It was in part a reaction against the rational scientific materialism of Tyndall and Huxley. This interest in the occult coincided with Yeats's connection with Symbolism and may have been a reaction against the dominant values of an industrial society. His interest in symbolism led to his friendship with Lionel Johnson and the Rhymers Club, members of 'That tragic generation'. The influence of symbolism as a movement is described and its effect on the poetry of Yeats is examined. Yet later he felt that his poetry should be made stark and in this he was helped mainly by two factors. One was the literary and intellectual influence of Ezra Pound upon Yeats. His influence was restricted to a social and political preference for authoritarianism and in a use of language that would be classical in form, directness and simplicity. The development of these ideas is analysed in relation to the poetry and drama of Yeats. Alongside this influence was his interest and work for the Irish Literary Revival which brought in new acquaintances and led Yeats to seek in the Irish tradition sources for a poetry that was modern and topical yet never lost sight of its romantic impulses. The influences and interactions between these various groups are examined in this chapter.

What is stressed is his growing preference for aristocracy and his links with his Irish background intensified
as he matured as a poet. Ifish events both brought out his social and political bias and formed his literary preferences. To understand the reasons for his preferences and his relations to other writers with the same outlook Chapter Four examines the Influence of Major Political Events and Thinkers upon Yeats. The nineteenth century background is described with emphasis on the political situation in Europe which as a result of nationalism, among other factors gave rise to a number of nation states. The rise of nationalism was associated with the Romantic movement and gains significance when we realize that Yeats, as an Irishman was also writing as an Irish nationalist. During the early years of twentieth century because of certain factors such as economic crisis we see the decay of democratic institutions and ideologies and the emergence of fascism. The second part of this chapter describes the parallel movement of nationalism in Ireland. In particular Yeats's reaction towards popular nationalism and the growth of the new middle class led to an increasing conservatism and inflexibility in Yeats's attitude towards popular politics. The influence of certain political leaders and thinkers upon Yeats is also discussed and the development of his ideas and attitudes in relation to the politics of his age and in particular to Irish politics is analysed. What is evident from this chapter is that Yeats was accepting and rejecting ideas in an attempt to evolve a system of ideas and values which would hold meaning in a time of rapidly disintegrating values. Thus he accepts Nietzsche, Burke, Berkeley, Swift and Goldsmith among others. It also explains his bent towards
fascism and his subsequent retreat from it.

His anti-democratic prejudice made him flirt with fascism for some time, but soon he came to see in it the worst features of the democracy he hated. So aristocracy of the classical type remained his political ideal. But its nature was dictated by aesthetic considerations like a yearning for beauty. Above all he is an Irishman looking to his own society as a source of strength. Therefore he is all the more critical and despairing of it and events in Ireland. In Chapter Five A Study of the Political Poems of W.B. Yeats a special study is made of all the political poems of Yeats. We include here poems based on national and international themes. From this chapter we can trace the development of Yeats's attitude towards Ireland. It is never constant. From a romantic idealistic view he moves to an increasingly complex and conservative view. It shows a breakdown in a traditional system of beliefs and ideas. Thus his poetry records the disintegration of a society, but what is perhaps its saving grace and which gives it tragic intensity is the view that the new order is not necessarily better. It is all part of a fated pattern, as seen from his A Vision. He used the symbols of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy of Ireland to dramatise the tragic transition.

Yet he neither inherited nor was born to that culture. Conservatism was his personal choice, the result of a quest. There is something romantic about it. Besides the aristocracy he celebrated had already started declining and was on its
way out. He felt the inevitability of change. Yet he clung
to it as an intellectual refuge. He also manufactured out of
his readings and experience a synthetic aristocracy combining
the best elements of conservative systems all over the world.
This also was romantic. Conservatives favour traditional
political action through custom and traditional machinery, but
Yeats's belief did not preclude political militancy, of a sort.
Unlike most conservatives he treasured liberty. Hence his
conservatism was romantic rather than traditional. Consider
his attack on the clergy for example.

Besides, as a poet and a man of rich imagination, he
could perceive the narrowness and limitations of all stereo-
typed political ideology. His poetry thus transcended
conservative politics. This explains in part the ironic
subtlety of his poetry. Yeats's commitment to society is
two-fold - that of a committed man of affairs and a poet with
patriotic feelings. This dualism goes a long way in explaining
the character of his political poetry.