To come back to political situation, W.T. Cosgrave and Kevin O'Higgins, who succeeded Arthur Griffith and Michael Collins, led the government successfully in the teeth of the civil war and bitter political opposition. Yeats was nominated a member of the Senate in 1922, on the ground of his membership of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. He was sorry that his contribution to the Irish theatre was not recognized. But he liked to be a senator as it is evident from his letter, written on December 18, 1922, to Olivia Shakespear.

"My work on the Senate interests me, a new technique which I am learning in silence - I have only spoken once and then but six sentences and I shall not speak again perhaps till I am (if I shall ever be) at ease with it". In another letter he expresses his interest in politics: "Politics are amusing and don't take much of my time ... In the Senate I speak as little upon politics as is possible, reserving myself for the things I understand".

2. Ibid., p. 704.
Though he spoke in the Senate more as a poet and less as a politician, his speeches, by no means, are impractical or visionary and an impartial reader must be impressed by their reason and practicability.

By that time Yeats had read books on philosophy and history in order to buttress the arguments of his views expressed in *A Vision* that was completed in 1924. The books that influenced him the most were *A Study of History* by Toynbee, *The Golden Bough* by Frazer, *The Reformation of Education* by Gentile and the works of Berkeley. It was Gentile's book that moulded his ideas of education and nationalism. In the Senate Yeats said that education must be imparted in the Italian method.

"Indeed, the whole curriculum of a school be as it were one lesson and not a mass of unrelated topics. I recommend Irish teachers to study the attempt now being made in Italy, under the influence of their Minister of Education, the philosopher Gentile, the most profound disciple of our own Berkeley, to so correlate all subjects to study. I would have each religion, Catholic or Protestant, so taught that permeate the whole school life ... that it may not be abstract and that it may be part of history and life itself, a part, as it were, of the foliage of Burke's tree".  

Yeats's visit in the capacity of a Senator to a school, run on the Montessori method, resulted in one of his most profound poems. Among the School Children, as Professor Donald Torchiana has pointed out, very artistically conveys Yeats's idea of education. He cannot but admire the children:

"The children learn to cipher and to sing
To study reading, books and histories,
To cut and sew, be neat in everything
In the best modern way .......

He rejects the education imparted by the great Greek teachers as their methods, being partial, have not been able to fulfil the aim of education.


2. Collected Poems, op. 242-243. Cf. "I assume that some tragic crisis shall so alter Europe and all opinion that the Irish Government will teach the great majority of its school-children nothing but ploughing, harrowing, sowing, curry-combing, bicycle cleaning, parcel-making, bale-pushing, tincan-soldering, door-knob-polishing, threshold-whitening, coat-cleaning, trouser-patching, and playing upon the squiffer, all things that serve human dignity ......." Explorations, p. 438.
"Plato thought nature but a spume that plays 
Upon a ghostly paradigm of things; 
Solider Aristotle played the taws 
Upon the bottom of a king of kings; 
World-famous golden-thighed Pythagoras 
Fingered upon a fiddle-stick or strings 
What a star sang or careless Muses heard 
Old clothes upon old sticks to scare a bird". ¹

Education, then, should be such that can resolve the antinomies of body and soul, of beauty and knowledge.

"Labour is blossoming or dancing where 
The beauty is not bruised to pleasure soul, 
Nor beauty born out of its grown despair 
Nor blear eyed wisdom out of midnight oil". ²

* The word "taws" has created a controversy over its meaning, (See G.S. Fraser, Vision and Rhetoric pp.73-76). But Yeats himself has given the meaning in his letter to Olivia Shakespear: "Here is a fragment of my last curse upon old age. It means that even the greatest men are owls, scarecrows, by the time their fame has come. Aristotle, remember, was Alexander's tutor, hence the taws (form of birch)". Letters of W.B. Yeats (Ed. A. Wade), p. 719.

1. Collected Poems, pp. 244-45.
2. Ibid., p. 245.
His speech in the Senate illuminates the last four lines of the poem. "I would like to suggest another principle, that the child itself must be the end in education. It is a curious thing how many times the education of Europe has drifted into error. For two or three centuries people thought that their various religious systems were more important than the child. In the modern world the tendency is to think of the nation; that it is more important than the child ... There is a tendency to subordinate the child to the idea of the nation ... We should always see that the child is the object and not any of our special purposes".  

The chestnut tree is the nation and the children are its foliage and they are, so, the inseparable and vital part of it. As we cannot say whether a tree is the root or trunk or the leaves, likewise the nation cannot be recognized by its parts. It is a whole which is more than the sum total of its parts and yet without parts it is nothing.

"O' chestnut tree, great rooted blossomer, Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole"?  

1. Senate Speeches, pp. 111-12.  
2. Collected Poems, p. 245.
The speech on divorce was a historic one. Yeats spoke against the proposals to impose the Roman Catholic view of marriage and divorce on the whole state.

"I think it is tragic that within three years of this country gaining independence we should be discussing a measure which a minority of this nation considers to be grossly oppressive. I am proud to consider myself a typical man of that minority". ¹ The poem The Three Monuments written shortly after the speech, hints in a bitter manner at the private lives of the three great Irish leaders, - Nelson, O'Connell and Parnell whose statues are at the public places - that they had gone against the Catholic view of marriage and divorce.²

"And all the popular Statesmen say
That purity built up the State

1. Senate Speeches - The speed on Divorce.
2. Cf. "I have said that this is a tolerant country, yet, remembering that we have in our principal streets certain monuments, I feel it necessary to say that it would be wiser if I had said this country is hesitating. I have no doubt whatever that, when the iceberg melts it will become an exceedingly tolerant country. The monuments are on the whole encouraging. I am thinking of O'Connell, Parnell, and Nelson.

The Senate Speeches, p. 97.
And after kept it from decay;
Admonish us to cling to that
And let all base ambition be,
For intellect would make us proud
And pride bring in impurity:
The three old rascals laugh aloud".  

Kevin O'Higgins, the Vice-President and Minister of Justice, was murdered on July 10, 1927, while he was on his way to Mass. Yeats was shocked, for he had considered O'Higgins to be one of the heroic men of Ireland. He wrote to Olivia Shakespear: "The murder of O'Higgins was no mere public event to us. He was our personal friend, as well as the one strong intellect in Irish public life and then too his pretty wife was our friend". Yeats's admiration for the "strong intellect in Irish public life" finds its expression in Death.

"A great man in his pride
Confronting murderous men
Casts derision upon
Supersession of breath;
He knows death to the bone -
He has created death".  

The last line invites a comparison with Donne's sonnet ending with "Death, thou shalt die". Like Donne Yeats confronts death, but while Donne's approach is religious and ratiocinative, Yeats's approach is human and intuitive.

The same theme of confrontation with "murderous men" is elaborated in the poem Blood and the Moon.

"In mockery I have set
A powerful emblem up,
And sing it rhyme upon rhyme
In mockery of a time
Half-dead at the top". 1

He declares very boldly, echoing his speech on divorce, that he belongs to the Anglo-Irish tradition, a tradition that produced the great champions of liberty.

"I declare this tower is my symbol
This winding, gyring, spiriting treadmill of a stair is my ancestral stair
That Goldsmith, and the Dean, Berkeley and Burke have travelled there". 2

2. Ibid., p. 268.
Swift's love for liberty*, Goldsmith's liberalism, Burke's love of people and Berkeley's idea of the nation -- all, he believes, created the glorious tradition of the eighteenth century Ireland.

II

Before his retirement from the Senate Yeats wrote to Olivia Shakespear: "Once out of the Senate - my time is up in September - and, in obedience to the doctors, out of all public work, there is no reason for more than three months of Dublin - where the Abbey is the one work I cannot wholly abandon. Once out of Irish bitterness I can find some measure of sweetness and of light, as befits old age".¹ Retiring from the Senate he busied himself in writing poetry and reading books on history and philosophy for the revision of A Vision.

A Vision, despite its esotericism and bizarre terminology, is not unreadable. It is useful to the readers not only for its "metaphors for poetry", as Yeats's instructors

* "Imitate him if you dare
   World-besotted traveller he
   Served human liberty".
   Collected Poems, p. 277.

1. Letters of W.B. Yeats, p. 737.
professed, but also for Yeats's interpretation of history and the place of the "Unity of Culture" in it. The first three chapters deal with the "Unity of Being". Man's soul, like the twentyeight phases of the moon, has twentyeight incarnations. The circle consisting of the twentyeight incarnations is divided into two halves ("tinctures"). The first half is called the "primary tincture" and it covers phase one to phase seven, and phase twentythree to phase twentyeight; the second half, the "antithetical tincture" covers the other remaining phases. The "primary tincture" is objective and the "antithetical tincture" is subjective. The fifteenth phase is the state of the "Unity of Being" but it does not exist in the living world, being the superhuman incarnation.

In the last two chapters Yeats interprets the flux and influx of history from the beginning of the Greek civilization to the present age. He divides the Great Year, as conceived by the ancient astrologers, into thirteen "lesser periods" each consisting of two milleniums.

"'By common consent men measure the year,' wrote Cicero, 'by the return of the sun, or in other words by the revolution of one star. But when the whole of the constellations shall return to the positions from which they once set forth, thus after a long interval remaking the first map of the heavens, that may indeed be called the
Great Year wherein I scarce dare say how many are the
generations of men. But the Great or Greatest Year was
something divided into lesser periods by the return of a
planet or of all the planets to some original position". ¹

Each "lesser period" is a wheel and millenniums
also, though a part of the "lesser period" are independent
wheels in themselves. "One must bear in mind", Years writes,
"that the Christian Era, like the two thousand years, let
us say, that went before it, is an entire wheel and each
half of it an entire wheel, that each half when it comes to
its 28th Phase reaches the 15th Phase or the 8th Phase of
the entire era". ²

A civilization comes to its end after two thousand
years. The older civilization of Babylon died and a new
civilization, the Greek civilization, took its place. The
Greek civilization began with the anunciation of Leda. After
two thousand years began the Christian era with the anunciation
of Mary. It follows, then, that the phase fifteen (the state
of the "Unity of Being" and the "Unity of Culture") has
occurred twice only in the history of civilization. First it

¹. A Vision, pp. 245-46.
². Ibid., p. 267.
occurred in the time of Pythagoras.¹ The "Unity of Culture" was achieved for the second time in the Renaissance (in Ireland in the eighteenth century). "Civilization rose again in the Renaissance", writes Yeats, "but not to the same level".² Yeats describes in detail the Renaissance, the time when the "Unity of Culture" was achieved, in Byzantium.

"I think that in early Byzantium, may be never before or since in recorded history, religious, aesthetic and practical life were one, that architect and artificers - though not, it may be, poets for language had been the instrument of controversy and must have grown abstract - spoke to the multitude and the few alike. The painter, the mosaic worker, the worker in gold and silver, the illuminator of sacred books, were almost impersonal perhaps without the consciousness of individual design, absorbed in their subject-matter and that the vision of a whole people ... and this vision, this proclamation of their invisible master, had the Greek nobility".³

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1. "There are moments when I am certain that art must accept those Greek proportions which carry into plastic art the Pythagorean numbers, those faces which are divine because all there is empty and measured". Explorations, p. 451.

2. Explorations, p. 439.

"If I were left to myself I could make Phase 15 coincide with Justinian's reign, that great age of building in which one may conclude Byzantine art was perfected".  

"Because the 15th Phase can never find direct human expression being a supernatural incarnation, it impressed upon work and thought an element of strain and artifice, a device to combine elements which may be incompatible".  

Describing the "Unity of Culture" Yeats expresses his ideas of a unified society in which the artists strive to achieve the "Unity of Being", the central image which binds the nations, individuals and civilizations together. The artist, in the fifteenth phase, absorbs himself in the work of art and in the vision of the whole people. The creation of great works of art was possible in the time of Pythagoras or Justinian because the artists could express through their art the vision of the whole people. 

But the gyres run. After phase 15, the period of full beauty, come phases sixteen, seventeen and so on. The cycle of history reaches phase 28 when a civilization comes 

2. Ibid., p. 289.
to its end. The observations of Yeats on the present age are quite interesting and they have much relevance to his political and prophetic poems. "The period from 1875 to 1927 (Phase 22 - in some countries and in some forms of thought the Phase runs from 1815 to 1927) is like that from 1250 to 1300 (Phase 8) a period of abstraction, and like it also in that it is preceded and followed by abstraction. Phase 8 was preceded by the Schoolmen and followed by legalists and inquisitors, and Phase 22 was preceded by the great popularisers of physical science and economic science, and will be followed by social movements and applied science".¹

"Day after day I have sat in my chair turning a symbol over in my mind, exploring all its details, defining and defining its elements, testing my convictions and those of others by its unity, attempting to substitute particulars for an abstraction like that of algebra. I have felt the convictions of a lifetime melt though at an age when the mind should be rigid, and others take their place, and these in turn give way to others. How far can I accept socialistic or communistic prophecies"?²

¹ A Vision, p. 299.
² Ibid., pp. 301-2.
But nothing comes - though this moment was to reward me for all my toil. Perhaps I am too old. Surely something would have come when I meditated under the direction of the Cabalists. What discord will drive Europe to that artificial unity - only dry or drying sticks can be tied into a bundle - which is the decadence of every civilization? ... Then I understand. I have already said all that can be said. The particulars are the work of the "Thirteenth Cone" or cycle which is in every man and called by every man his freedom.¹

Now the question arises: Can *A Vision* be said to have relevance to Yeats's poetry in general and political poetry in particular? T.R. Henn has justified the importance of *A Vision* that it has interest for three reasons; first, for Yeats's interpretation of history; secondly, for the symbolic values he found in the works of artists; and thirdly, for the clues to the writings of his mind.² But he does not refer to its practical implications whether it presents any solution to the problems of the contemporary world. First, *A Vision*, I think, reflects Yeats's attitude towards the present age in its relation to the past ages. To Yeats phase 15 is the ideal period in the cyclic history of a

civilization. The eighteenth century Ireland was the ideal society in his opinion. He was aggrieved that the present society was so much different from the society of his ideal. He found that the changes that took place in the beginning of the twentieth century made the situation the worst in Ireland and the rest of the world. This made him ask the question, does every civilization end in the tragic way? The answer to this question is given in the concluding paragraph of A Vision that it is the "Thirteenth Cone" that intervenes and it is "called by everyman his freedom". A Vision, therefore, is a philosophic interpretation of history in terms of rise and fall of civilizations and thus it provides a base to Yeats's poems that deal with the crisis of values in the troubled political situation of the present age.

* The Second Coming, Meditations in Time of Civil War, Leda and the Swan, Lapis Lazuli, The Black Tower, Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen, to name a few, definitely have their source in politics but they are something more than that; they go deep into the problems created by the crisis of values.