Yeats wrote his last political statement in the essay 'On the Boiler' (now included in Explorations with a few omissions). He expresses the opinion that politics, at present, is a plaything in the hands of politicians, journalists and the mob. The Irish people, therefore, must look back to their glorious past and evolve a political system that can make them a great and powerful nation. Yet the essay cannot be said to be propounding a political philosophy as the essays of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau do. Yeats himself says that it is an occasional publication:  

The subjects of Yeats's contention are aristocracy, Irishry, education and literature which, if combined together, form the "Unity of Culture". Taking the help of psychology he points out the defects of democracy that it, after all, is the rule of the mob, the combination of low-calibred people. He asserts the superiority of aristocracy, for it is aristocracy alone that has ruled a country in the best way. The standard of the Senate has declined because now

1. He wrote to Maud Gonne: "On the boiler is an occasional publication like my old 'Samhain', which I am about to bring about." Letters of W.B. Yeats (Ed. A. Wade), p.910.
the Senators are elected and in the past they were nominated. "As the nominated element began to die out - almost all were old men - the Senate declined in ability and prestige. In its early days some old banker or lawyer would dominate the House." 

In the same vein he writes: "I was six years in the Irish Senate; I am not ignorant of politics elsewhere, and on other grounds I have some right to speak. I say to those that shall rule here: 'If ever Ireland seems molten wax, reverse the process of revolution. Do not try to pour Ireland into any political system. Think first how many able men with public minds the country has, how many it can hope to have in the near future, and mould your system upon those men. It does not matter how you get them, but get them. Republics, Kingdoms, Soviets, Corporates, Parliaments, are trash ... These men, whether six or six hundred, are the core of Ireland, are Ireland itself.'

He contrasts "Irishry" with the general trait of the English and observes that while the Irish are subjective, the English are objective; it consists of the noble and heroic qualities of the heroic men (both Protestant and

1. Explorations, p. 413.
2. Ibid., p. 414.
Catholic) of Ireland. "I write with two certainties in mind: first that a hundred men, their creative power wrought to the highest pitch, their will trained but not broken, can do more for the welfare of a people, whether in war or peace, than a million of any lesser sort no matter how expensive their education, and that although the Irish masses are vague and excitable because they have not yet been moulded and cast, we have a good blood as there is in Europe. Berkeley, Swift, Burke, Grattan, Parnell, Augusta Gregory, Synge, Kevin O'Higgins are the true Irish people, and there is nothing too hard for such as these. If the Catholic names are few, history will soon fill the gap. My imagination goes back to those Catholic exiled gentlemen of whom Swift said that their bravery exceeded that of all nations".¹

The educational system should impart the knowledge of "all things that serve human dignity" to young children. By "all things that serve human dignity" Yeats means the skill of doing things which are of use in day-to-day life. Settling the ordinary things he comes to the more important aspect of education. Language and mathematics are the subjects that require greater emphasis. Greek, Gaelic and one modern language must be taught in schools. Latin is of no use being a language of decadence. His views on Gaelic

¹. *Explorations*, pp. 41-42.
are judicious and practical: "Greek and Irish they should speak as fluently as they now speak English. If Irish is to become the national tongue the change must come slowly, almost imperceptibly; a sudden or forced change of language may be the ruin of the soul. England has forced English upon the schools and colleges of India, and now after generations of teaching no Indian can write or speak animated English and his mother tongue is despised and corrupted. Catholic Ireland is but slowly recovering from its change of language in the eighteenth century. Irishmen learn English at their mother's knee, English is now their mother tongue, and a sudden change would bring a long barren epoch".  

Now the question arises, how far did Yeats believe in the practicability of his views expressed in On the Boiler? Probably, he was not very sure of the practical aspects and he considered it to be his Utopia. At the end of the essay he acknowledges that it is, after all, an expression of his ideals. "In my savage youth I was accustomed to say that no man should be permitted to open mouth in Parliament, until he had sung or written his 'Utopia', for lacking that we could not know where he was taking us, and I still think that artists of all kinds should once again praise or represent great or happy people. Here

1. Explorations, p. 440.
in Monte Carlo, where I am writing, somebody talked of a man
with a monkey and some sort of stringed instrument, and it
has pleased me to imagine him a politician". 1

The Municipal Gallery Revisited is closely related
to the statements of On the Boiler and it sings of the
"Great or happy people". The opening stanza describes the
brave and heroic men of Ireland :

"Around me the images of thirty years
An ambush; pilgrims at the water side;
Casement upon trial, half-hidden by the bars,
Guarded; Griffith, staring in hysterical pride;
Kevin O'Higgins' countenance that wears
A gentle questioning look that cannot hide
A soul incapable of remorse or rest;
A revolutionary soldier kneeling to be blessed". 2

Yeats had hoped for this Ireland which "the poets have
imagined terrible and gay". All his life, he states in the
subsequent stanzas, he strove for that Ireland and, in his
task, he was ably supported by J.M. Synge and Lady Gregory.

"John Synge, I and Augusta Gregory, thought
All that we did, all that we said or sang
Must come from contact with soil, from that
Contact everything Antaeus-like grew strong.

1. Explorations, pp. 451-52.
We three alone in modern times had brought
Everything down to that sole test again
Dream of the noble and the beggar-man”. 1

He feels proud, although he has not been successful in his
efforts to bring the "Unity of Culture", that he had friends
like O'Higgins, Arthur Griffith, J.M. Synge and Lady Gregory,
who, here, are no more human beings but the heroes of Ireland.

"You that would judge me, do not judge alone
This book or that, come to this hallowed place
Where my friends' portraits hang and look thereon;
Ireland's history in their lineaments trace;
Think where man's glory most begins and ends,
And say my glory was I had such friends". 2

The Statues is closely related to the Municipal Gallery
Revisited; it has its source in On the Boiler: and it
attempts to trace Ireland's history in the "lineaments" of
the subjective men (symbolized by Cuchulain and Pearse).
Dr. B. Rajan has pointed out that The Statues is "an
attempted fusion of cultural history with Irish nationalism". 3
But, in my opinion, it is something more than that; the
theme of the poem is that the superiority of art and thought

2. Ibid., p. 470.
makes a nation great and invincible. The poet, looking at the statues made by the Greek artists, meditates upon their measured and, yet, living character. At first, he thinks that Pythagoras planned them. But in the next stanza he adds that it was the artists who gave living character to those "plummet-measured" statues.

"No ! Greater than Pythagoras, for the men
That with a mallet or a chisel modelled these
Calculations that look but casual flesh, put down
All Asiatic vague immensities,
And not the banks of oars that swam upon
The many-headed foam at Salamis". 1

The reference to Buddha in the third stanza has made it difficult and obscure. Even Yeats's letter throws little light on it.* How to relate Buddha to Cuchulain? The meaning of "Buddha's emptiness" and "Pearse summoned Cuchulain" is clear when we see that Cuchulain, Yeats's


* "In reading the third stanza", Yeats wrote to Edith Shackleton, "remember the influence on modern sculpture and on the great seated Buddha of the sculptors who followed Alexander. Cuchulain is in the last stanza because Pearse and some of his followers had a cult of him. The Government has put a statue of Cuchulain in the rebuilt Post Office to commemorate this". Letters of W. B. Yeats, p. 911.
ideal hero, is the spiritual descendant of Apollo and Buddha. The artists who came to India, after Alexander's conquest, influenced the Indian art. The statues of Buddha found in the North-West India are in the style of Greek art. The movement of cultural history is like this: it moves from the antithetical Europe to primary Asia and then returns back to the antithetical Europe. It is the subjective men and antithetical art that always win against the objective men and their civilization".  

Now the people of Ireland face the same situation that the Greeks faced at Salamis. They must remember that they belong to the same antithetical Europe that defeated the "many-headed foam" of Persia, the symbol of disorder.

"We Irish form into that ancient sect
But thrown upon this filthy modern tide
And by its formless spawning fury wrecked,
Climb to our proper dark, that we may trace
The lineaments of a plummet-measured face".  

1. "There are moments when I am certain that art must once again accept those Greek proportions which carry into plastic art the Pythagorean numbers, those faces which are divine because all there is empty and measured. Europe was not born when Greek Galleys defeated the Persian hordes at Salamis; but when the Doric studios sent out those broad-becked marble-statues against the multiform, vague, expressive Asiatic sea, they gave to the sexual instinct of Europe its goal, its fixed type".  

Explorations, p. 451.
Towards the end of his life Yeats was convinced of the coming disaster. The growing political uncertainty and man's lust for power filled him with horror. He said his last words, but this time in a less convincing tone, in the poem The Black Tower written a few days before his death. The tower, Yeats's symbol of heroic Irish tradition, is black not because it is painted black but because it is ancient; and its men, too, are old and poor. They are hard-pressed in the present critical situation and yet are fully determined to defend it from the invaders as they know that it is the ancient tradition alone that can save the world from the disintegrating disaster. They are resolute not to be persuaded by any political propaganda because, they fully realize, politicians are enemies to tradition and humanity.

"Say that the men of the old black tower,
Though they but feed as the goatherds feed,
Their money spent, their wine gone sour,
Lack nothing that soldier needs
That all are oath-bound men;
Those banners come not in".

They are faithful to their tradition and would not give in to the political pressure, even though they are approached with bribes and threatenings.

"Those banners come in to bribe or threaten,
Or whisper that a man's a fool
Who when his own right king forgotten
Cares what king sets up his rule
If he died long ago
Why do you dread us so"?¹

The atmosphere of the poem grows darker in the concluding stanza where the defenders disbelieve the words of a man who raises the hope for the king's return. The informant is called a lying hound and the defenders remain faithful to their duty despite the fact that they are handful in number and the opponents are too powerful to defend.

"The tower's old cook that must climb and clamber
Catching small birds in the dew of the morn
When we hale men lie stretched in slumber
Swears that he hears the king's great horn.
But he's a lying hound:
Stand we on guard oath bound".²

¹ Collected Poems, p. 396.
² Ibid., p. 397.