CONCLUSION

Yeats's development as a poet shows a remarkable consistency and tenacity. His poetic career belies the validity of the maxim, art for art's sake. He, too, had started his poetic career in the tradition of the aesthetes but it was his active participation in politics that brought him back home from the world of Arcadia. Born in an Anglo-Irish family, Yeats learnt the first lessons of poetry through Spenser, Shelley, Pater, Morris and Rossetti. Under the influence of these poets, Yeats developed the theory that only beautiful things should be expressed in poetry. The poet who thinks in this way can express anything but life and he tends to be an escapist, an escapist who deserts the world of action for the world of lotus-eaters. Had Yeats not come in contact with the political organizations, he would have been either a Morris or a Rossetti.

It was the political situation of Ireland and the family tradition that aroused nationalist feelings in him to join a political party like the Sinn Fein or the I.R.3.,* a secret underground organization.

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* The Irish Republican Brotherhood, and it should not be confused with the I.R.A., the Irish Republican Army.
Now, the problem before him was not the composition of a dream-song but the evolution of a rich Irish literature that could be an integrating factor in Irish life and that could compete with other literatures of Europe. Ireland, he felt, had a glorious past but in the 19th century that glory was lost because of the English rule, and it was the duty of the Irish men to revive the old spirit of Ireland by means of literature. He engaged himself in writing poetry on exclusively Irish materials and advised his compatriots to do so. He founded Irish literary societies in London, Dublin and at other places, lectured at various clubs, and organized the Abbey Theatre for the intellectual movement. All these activities, the experiences at various places and contact with men, made him a man of the world. Now, he wandered no more in the romantic world; contemporary problems took the place of the sagas of ancient Irish history.

The controversies over the publication of books, the estrangement in love, the riots over Synge's and his own plays and the criticism of the Church, all seasoned him to face the stern realities of life. His poetry took a sharp turn; the old dreaminess, vagueness, weariness and melancholy gave way to bitterness, terseness, precision and acceptance of reality. In the Hugh Lane poems Yeats broke away from the French symbolist tradition in the use of symbols; whereas the French symbolists used private symbols
(that needed some explanations), Yeats made the public men
the symbols of the noble qualities and virtues he admired.

Even in the Easter poems, where he admires the
martyrdom of Pearse, Connolly, MacBride, MacDonagh and
others, the change from his early style is evident; the
weariness and faintness of early style are visible nowhere
and the words used are sparing and contain much more meaning
than the dictionary says. Conchubar, Cuchulain, Fergus,
Aengus and Deirdre are replaced by Wolfe Tone, Edward
Fitzgerald, Emmet, O'Leary, Parnell, Pearse, Connolly and
MacBride who become a part of Yeats's mythology. This style
anticipates the rich and consummate style of The Tower and
subsequent volumes.

Yeats hoped that the heroic martyrdom of Pearse
and Connolly and his followers would bring an emotional
integration and political stability in Ireland but this
mood did not last long; the deteriorating political situation
made him apprehensive of the future. The reprisals of the
Black and Tans, cruelty on both Irish and British sides, the
civil war, the growing power of Germany, and at last, the
failure of the League of Nations, all this only horrified
him. Even after the independence in 1922 and the formation
of an Irish Government peace could not be established for
the conflict, between the groups of De Valera and Griffith,
which led to the civil war.
While Yeats was in the Senate he spoke of his ideals and gave some practical suggestions but religious fanaticism that prevailed in Irish politics frustrated almost all his plans. Disillusionment impelled him to look for a philosophy that could be the base of all his writings. Experiments in magic, the automatic writing of Mrs. Yeats, the Buddhist cycle of life, and Toynbee's interpretation of history provided him with the material that he needed in the interpretation of history. He evolved a system, or better a myth, that interprets the rise and fall of civilizations with the flow and ebb of the tides of history. All his later poems, excluding a few love poems, have their base in *A Vision*.

As the situation of the world worsened he grew more apprehensive of the future of mankind; he felt that the cycle of Christian civilization was reaching its end and the new era that was to begin, would probably he worse.

"That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born"?¹

¹. *Collected Poems*, p. 211.
Yet, he contended that man should not take a defeatist attitude; he must face the most grim situation in a heroic manner and only then the ancient tradition would survive.

Now the question arises, how far Yeats was successful in his political poems? Did political ideas, so prominent in his later poetry, narrow the horizon and dilute the intensity of his personal feelings? Or to put in other words, is his later poetry propagandist? The answer, I think, is that Yeats, by writing poems on public themes widened the field of poetry; he showed to his contemporaries that poetry may be written on any subject if the poet has sincerity of feeling. The Easter poems, the Hugh Lane poems, the civil war poems and such other poems that were written under the influence of politics, transcend politics and express the poet's personal feelings which are shared by all and which are common to all. Some of the philosophical poems, like *Sailing to Byzantium* and *Leda and the Swan* had their sources in politics but it was Yeats's power of transmutation that even political overtones are absent from them.

Yeats's political poetry is neither propagandist nor ephemeral; it is a poetry which expresses his true voice of feeling, a feeling which is genuine, sincere and honest. Only a few poets have handled political events
and transmuted them to great poetry and Yeats belongs to that class of distinguished poets.

But it has been my endeavour in this work not merely to consider Yeats as a political poet, nor even to trace the influence of politics on the development of his poetic career, but also to suggest that all his great poetry emanated from his involvement in or reaction to different political trends and situations in Ireland. Political turmoil in Ireland first roused him from his dreamy romanticism; it became a stark geographical and cultural entity - it gave him a sense of belonging and identity, but gradually it also turned out to be a microcosm of the whole world. He saw the history of the western world revealed in its various phases in its past and present. And with his Irish experience he looked at the world and tried to understand its problems. In fact, all his deep thinking and meditation on human life, its values and future arose out of his deep awareness of the crisis and hope generated by the political experiments and upheavals of his time, with some of which he was actually associated in their Irish form. In this sense a study of his political ideas may be found to be very rewarding and helpful. There may be doubt and controversy over the soundness of his political ideal or affiliation, but the value of his political ideas to the creation of a body of great poetry and his great poetic genius cannot be questioned. I have
tried in this work to relate this poetic greatness to the seminal ideas which in Yeats's case, I think, were mostly political. Even other ideas such as those of love or of mystic or philosophic experience owe considerably, either directly or by implication, to his participation or frustration in politics.