It is not surprising that young Yeats wrote his first poems in the tradition of Spenser and Shelley for he was brought up in the romantic tradition of his time and during that period he was little aware of the world around him. Poems like *The Song of the Fairies* and *The Voices* are from the pen of the poet quite unconcerned with stern realities and contemporary world and living in the world of his own romantic dream:

"What do you make so fair and bright?"
"I make the cloak of sorrow:
0 lovely to see in all men's sight
Shall be the cloak of Sorrow
In all men's sight".  

In the same vein are the poems *Miserrimus* and *The Song of the Last Arcadian*, which owe much to Spenser for style and to Shelley for vocabulary. Here Yeats believes in the truth of dreams and words, not of life and experience:

1. Renamed *The Boat, The Cloak* and *The Shoes*.
3. Renamed *The Song of the Happy Shepherd* and *The Sad Shepherd* respectively.
"But O' sick children of the world
Of all the many changing things
In dreary dancing past us whirled
To the cracked tune that Chronos sings,
Words alone are certain good".  

and,

"But ah! she dreams not now; dream thou!
For fair are poppies on the brow:
Dream, dream, for this is also sooth".

Likewise, The Sad Shepherd echoes The Cloak, The Boat and The Shoes,

"I will my heavy story tell
Till my own words, re-echoing, shall send
Their sadness through a hollow, pearly heart;
And my own tale again for me shall sing,
And my own whispering words be comforting,
And lo! my ancient burden may depart".  

The only way to remove sorrow is to tell the story in verse and to dream in the world of Arcadia. Other poems, written in this period, are of the same pattern and express the melancholy, contemplative and dreamy heart of a youth living far away from the world of action, struggle and conflict. A few poems written on Indian themes, under the influence of Mohini Chatterjee, are not Indian in spirit and convey the

2. Ibid., p. 9.
same dreamful longings. Dr. F.R. Leavis has rightly shown by comparison how early Yeats wrote poems very similar to those of the minor romantic and Pre-Raphaelite poets. The only significant poem in the volume The Crossways is The Stolen Child which has its source in the Irish folk-lore. It is in this poem that for the first time Yeats makes use of Irish material he collected at Sligo. The Irish, even to-day, like the Indians, believe in the existence of spirits and fairies. The places haunted by them are mountains, caves, mounds and "raths". The poem describes the common and popular belief that fairies sometimes lure human beings

1. F.R. Leavis, New Bearings in English Poetry, pp. 33-34.
3. Yeats writes in Autobiographies: "His (George Pollexfen's) servant Mary Battle, who had been with him since he was a young man, had the second sight and that, may be, inclined him to strange studies. One morning she was about to bring him a clean, but stopped saying there was blood on the shirt front and that she must bring another. On his way to his office he fell, crossing over a little wall, and cut himself and bled on the linen where she had seen the blood. In the evening, she told him that the shirt she had thought bloody was quite clean. She could neither read nor write and her mind, which answered his gloom with its merriments, was rammed with every sort of old history and strange belief. Much of 'Celtic Twilight is but her daily speech". pp. 70-71.
to come to them. The world of the fairies is marked with jollity and gaiety, not to be found in man's world. The fairies live in places

"Where the wandering water gushes
From the hills above Glen-car,
In pools among the rushes
That scarce could bathe a star,
We seek for slumbering trout
And whispering in their ears
Give them unquiet dreams;
Leaning softly out
From ferns that drop their tears
Over the young streams".

They lure the child to come to them

"Come away, 0 human child
To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand
For the world's more full of weeping
than you can understand".

Despite the use of Irish material the poem fails to present any deep understanding of life because the total impression is: "The world's more full of weeping than you can understand". The child comes to the fairies to escape from the sorrows of the world.

Yeats in *The Crossways* has a very false start, a start that could have led him nowhere had he not abandoned the path of romantic melancholy trodden by Robert Bridges and the poets of the Rhymers' Club. In the period of *The Crossways*, Yeats paid little attention to the events that were taking place in his time. He held the opinion "that only beautiful things should be painted, and that only ancient things and stuff of dreams were beautiful. And I almost quarrelled with my father when he made a large watercolour, one of his finest pictures and now lost, of a consumptive beggar". 1

By the time Yeats started to write *The Wanderings of Oisin*, 2 he had gone through many changes. "The debates," writes A.N. Jeffares, "in the Young Ireland Society, O'Leary's conversation, and the patriotic books he read at the period were the main reasons for his subsequent work". 3 Once a man gave Yeats some verses to read and when he read them, he was so moved that he burst into tears. 4 In the essay *What is Popular Poetry?* he wrote: "I had read Shelley and Spenser and had tried to mix their styles together in a pastoral play which I have now come to dislike much, and yet I do not think Shelley and Spenser ever moved me as did these

1. *Autobiographies*, p. 82.
poets (of the Young Ireland Society). Now he started reading the verses of Gaelic writers in translation. In a letter to Katharine Tynan, he wrote: "I feel more and more that we shall have a school of poetry founded on Irish myth and history - a neo-romantic movement". The poem *The Wanderings of Oisin* is an attempt to write poetry founded on Irish myth and history. It narrates the story of legendary Oisin who, according to the Irish folk-lore, lived with Niamh, a fairy or Danaan, for three centuries and later came to Ireland to see his fellow-men. "The events", writes Yeats in the "notes", "it describes, like most of the poems in this volume, are supposed to have taken place rather in the indefinite period, made up of many periods, described by the folk-tales, than in any particular century: it therefore, like the later Fenian stories themselves, mixes much that is mediaeval with much that is ancient. The Gaelic poems do not make Oisin go to more than one island but a story in *Silva Gadelica* describes "four paradises", an island to the north, an island to the west, an island to the south and Adam's paradise in the east".

1. *Essays and Introductions*, p. 3.
The poem opens with the conversation between St. Patrick and Oisin who is "bent, and bald, and blind". Oisin tells the story of his adventures; how he met Niamh, fell in love with her and travelled with her to three islands for three centuries and, later, came to Ireland to see his fellow men. It is divided into three parts. In the first part Oisin describes his meeting with Niamh, the daughter of Aengus and Edain, her expression of love and the marriage with her, in the island of fairies. In the second part he describes the fearful fight, between him and the protean demon, in which he strikes the demon with the sword of Manannan,

"And then I drew the livid chop
Of a drowned dripping body to my breast
Horror from horror grew; but when the west
Had surged up in a plumy fire, I drave
Through heart and Spine; and cast him in the wave
Lest Niamh shudder".  

Living with Niamh for three hundred years, Oisin, in the third part of the poem, remembers the Fenians and wishes to see them. He is allowed to visit his country but is forbidden by Niamh from touching the ground. He commits the mistake and soon becomes an old man, three hundred years old, never to be young again. He is converted to Christianity by St.

Patrick but he longs for the Fenians, the pre-Christian men, and decides to go to them.

"I will go to Caoilte, and Conan, and Bran, Sceolan, Lomair, And dwell in the house of the Fenians, be they in flames or at feast". ¹

The Wanderings of Oisin is a remarkable achievement of Yeats not only for its imagery, diction and narrative quality but for the handling of Irish material. Yeats's patriotism is expressed through symbols ² and undertones. Even if we do not identify the poet with Oisin, he shows his preference for the Ireland of the Fenians ("Fenians", of course, is ambiguous here and refers symbolically to both pre-Christian and present Ireland) and not for the island of the Young (The Island of Statues).

¹ Collected Poems, pp. 428-29.
² R. Ellmann gives the following interpretation of the fight between Oisin and the demon: "Then he makes a second voyage to a different kind of island, where 'rose a world of tower/And blackness in the dark'. Surely this is a symbolical England seen through Irish eyes. Here is the castle of Manannan, the old God of the sea, his place taken now by a "brown demon". The demon has enchained a beautiful lady who, like the enchained young man in 'The Two Titans', symbolizes Ireland.

Yeats The Man and the Masks, p. 53.
The next volume The Rose, published in 1893, advances towards a clearer expression of Yeats's nationalism. Those readers who read only his poetry and are surprised to see the later Yeats so different from the early Yeats, may get the answer if they read the prose works side by side. The period between 1887 and 1891 was the most formative period in Yeats's poetic career; he took the right decision of combining nationalism with poetry, and reviving the Irish literature. In a letter to Katharine Tynan he wrote:

"I have a good deal of work to do at present, more than I can manage, all at Irish Literary subjects - which is as it should be. I wish you had made up the Irish novelists and folk-lorists. You with your ready pen would find plenty to say about them. There is a want for a short book (about 150 pages or 200) on Irish literature. Lives and criticism of all the writers since Moore. It would sell largely, I hope, and do good work I am sure. Some day you or I must take it in hand. There is a great want for a just verdict on these men and their use for Ireland. I have often thought of setting about such a book and may when I have got on more with the novel writers".¹ This letter clearly expresses the

¹ The Letters of W.B. Yeats, (Ed. A. Wade), p. 133.
thoughts that were in Yeats's mind. He knew clearly that if he was to write poetry expressing the true voice of feeling, he ought to revive the Irish literature and enrich it by his poetry.

After his experiments with magical symbols he came to believe in the existence of the Great Memory and the Great Mind of which the individual minds and memories are a part. In the essay Magic he wrote the conclusion of his experiments:

"(1) That the borders of minds are ever shifting, and that many minds can flow into one another, as it were, and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy.

(2) That the borders of our memories are as shifting, and that our memories are a part of one great memory, the memory of Nature herself.

(3) That this great mind and great memory can be evoked by symbols." ¹

If there could be the Great Mind and the Great Memory, he thought, every nation must have got a mind and a memory of its own, independent of individual minds and

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¹ Essays and Introductions, p. 28.
memories. This idea led him to develop the concept of the "Unity of Being" and the "Unity of Culture". By the "Unity of Being" Yeats means "an image or a bundle of related images symbolical or evocative of the state of mind" which unifies nations, races and individuals together. In his Autobiographies he explains his idea of the "Unity of Being": "In men and race alike there is something called "Unity of Being", using that term as Dante used it when he compared beauty in the 'Convito' to a perfectly proportioned human body.¹ In short, the "Unity of Being" is the unifying image of a nation or civilization.

The "Unity of Being" was achieved in the times of Homer and Dante when Europe was integrated and nations, races and individuals were unified by a single image. But the process of disintegration started from the time of Shakespeare and reached its finality in the twentieth century. To bring the "Unity of Being" back to Europe again, there was the need of the reversal of the process of progression. This could be done only by means of literature, a literature which has its roots in mythology and folklore.²

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¹. Autobiographies, pl 190.
². Later, Yeats revised his views in A Vision vide supra.
². "I thought", Yeats writes in his Autobiographies, "that all art should be a Centaur finding in the popular lore its back and its strong legs ..." p. 191.
The symbols used in The Rose volume, having their sources in the Irish mythology and folklore, are an attempt to evoke the image that unifies the nation, the race and the individuals. In the poem 'The Rose Upon the Rood of Time' Yeats invokes the symbolical rose to come near him so that he will sing the glory of ancient Ireland.

"Come near; I would, before my time to go,
Sing of old Eire and the ancient ways:
Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days". 1

Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea 2 indirectly hints at the sad plight of the Irish people, constantly struggling against England. Cuchulain symbolizes the passionate and heroic Irish men who fought with England which is symbolized here by the sea. A Faery Song 3 sung by the fairy over the death of Diarmuid and Grania "in their bridal sleep under Cromlech", is a product of Yeats's exploration of Irish mythology. The Lake Isle of Innisfree 4, much anthologised but disliked by Yeats in his later years, is a sentimental expression of the poet's longing for Sligo. "I had still the ambition, formed in Sligo in my teens, of living in imitation of Thoreau on

1. Collected Poems, p. 35.
2. Ibid., pp. 47-48.
3. Ibid, pp. 43-44.
4. Ibid., p. 41.
Innisfree, a little island in Lough Gill, and when walking through Fleet Street very homesick I heard a little tinkle of water and saw a fountain in a shop-window which balanced a little ball upon its jet, and began to remember lake water. From the sudden remembrance came my poem Innisfree my first lyric with anything in its rhythm of my own music". ¹

Yeats was asked by an American publisher to compile an anthology of Irish fairy stories (published under the title The Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry) and a two-volume selection from the Irish novelists. The poem The Dedication to a Book of Stories,² is in praise of those writers included in the book Selections from the Irish Novelists. In this poem Yeats expresses his earnestness to compose poems on Irish themes. He feels sad that the Irish literature, symbolized here by "the green branch with many bells", that had charmed everybody, the aristocracy and the peasantry alike, is now withered, crossed, battered and destroyed. Although the poem is tinged with sadness at the beginning, it ends with a note of optimism:

"Gay bells or sad, they bring you memories
Of half-forgotten innocent old places:
We and our bitterness have left no traces
On Munster grass and Connemara skies".³

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¹. Autobiographies, p. 153.
³. Ibid., p. 51.
The Rose volume ends with the prophetic poem To Ireland in the Coming Times. As Jeffares and Stock have pointed out, the poem is a reply to the charge made by Maud Gonne and the Young Irelanders that he was indifferent to the cause of Ireland, devoting much time to occultism. It begins with the defence that the poet is equally active in the liberation of Ireland as other members of the Young Ireland Society are:

"Know, that I would accounted be
True brother of a company
That sang, to sweeten Ireland's wrong
Ballad and story, rann and song;
Nor be I any less of them ..."

He compares himself to other poets who had aroused nationalist ideas by their literary compositions or by active participation in the programmes of the Fenian Brotherhood, the Home Rule League and the Young Ireland Party.

"Nor may I less be counted one
With Davis, Mangan, Ferguson,
Because, to him who ponders well,
My rhymes more than their rhyming tell
Of things discovered in the deep,
Where only body's laid asleep".

4. Ibid., p. 57.
The prophetic note which dominates many of Yeats's great poems, is seen in the concluding lines:

"I cast my heart into my rhyme
That you, in the dim coming times
May know my heart with them
After the red-rose-bordered him". 1

The play The Countess Cathleen, published along some of the poems of 'The Rose' volume under the title the Countess Cathleen and Other Poems, indirectly expresses Yeats's nationalist feelings. The heroine of the play is Countess Cathleen. Seeing her peasants starving to death in a great famine she sells her soul to the Devil in order to save them. Though interpreted as a biographical play (Maud Gonne, the Countess, and Yeats, Aleel) it expresses Yeats's political ideas. The Countess wins the sympathy of the peasants and strengthens the tie between the peasants and the aristocrats (with a complete negation of the middle class); the Irish setting suggests the suffering of the Irish people under the British rule (the two merchants representing England, the Nation of Shopkeepers). Unfortunately the political implication of the play was overshadowed by the rage over the religious and moral issues.

The tragic death of Charles Parnell, who had played a dominant role in Irish politics, was a great blow to Yeats. In a divorce case, filed by Captain O'Shea, it was alleged that Parnell was involved with Mrs. O'Shea before obtaining a divorce. This caused a great uproar and the Prime Minister of England deposed Parnell of his leadership in the Parliament. The inscrutable and proud Parnell could not bear it; he broke down and died six months thereafter. This treatment of Parnell by the Irish people shocked Yeats; he had not expected that the people of Ireland would betray their leader in his sore need. He felt that the unity between the nation and the individuals in Ireland was broken and that his plan to bring the "Unity of Culture" in Ireland was nipped in the bud.¹

¹ "I had seen", Yeats writes, "Ireland in my own time turn from the bragging rhetoric and gregarious humour of O'Connell's generation and school, and offer herself to the solitary and proud Parnell as to her anti-self, buskin followed hand on sock, and I had begun to hope, or to half-hope, that we might be the first in Europe to seek unity as deliberately as it had been sought by theologian, poet, sculptor, architect, from the eleventh to the thirteenth century". Autobiographies, p. 195.