The death of Parnell in 1891 marked the end of an era noted for its heroic leaders; the events that followed it culminated in the division between the Parnellites and the anti-Parnellites, the latter commanding the majority. There was a reaction against politics, and literary activities took the place of politics.\(^1\) The literary activities constituted the Anglo-Irish or Celtic Literary revival. Yeats had earlier prophesied in the book 'Selections from Irish Novelists' that there was to be an intellectual movement in Ireland in the first lull of politics.\(^2\) He led the intellectual movement by founding Irish literary societies in London and Ireland. The Southwark Irish Literary Society had no seriousness and its lackadaisical methods contributed nothing to the development of Irish literature. Yeats's lecture at the Southwark Irish Literary Society impressed the listeners because of the complete absence of quotations and narrative in it. He founded in London The Irish Literary Society which all

---

1. For a detailed discussion, see A.N. Jeffares: Yeats: Man and the Poet, p. 82.
2. Autobiographies, p. 199.
London-Irish authors and journalists joined. Inspired by the success in London, he founded the National Literary Society in Dublin, with the aim to create an Irish Theatre. J. Hone, in the Biography, writes, "In his contributions to the Pilot he continually set nationalism against internationalism. He drew attention to Douglas Hyde's Gaelic translations and the romances of Standish O'Grady. He wrote of now forgotten poetesses, Ellen O'Leary and Rose Kavanagh. 'There is no fine literature without nationality', he reiterated. He believed that a writer needs 'subject matter' and in this he was upheld by his friends of the Rhymers' Club, where one was a scholar in music-halls, another a Grecian or an authority on the age of Chaucer ... His influence in Ireland was not wholly confined to the patriotic group". Many things inspired Yeats to jump into the national literary movement. He received a great support from John O'Leary, the Young Ireland Society, and Maud Gonne. From the very beginning, with an untiring zeal, he made a great impression and became greatly successful in his attempt. A workman's wife, who wrote patriotic stories in some weekly newspaper, invited Yeats to her house and in her speech, paying a glowing tribute to him, she compared him to Thomas Davis and Michael Davitt.

1. J. Hone, W.B. Yeats (1865-1939), p. 82.
Yeats infused a new vigour into the activities of the national literary movement. In the National Literary Society, Dublin, at first, there was no attendance of eminent persons but due to Yeats's efforts prominent men like John O'Leary, J.P. Taylor, Douglas Hyde, Dr. Sigerson, Count Plunkett, Dr. Coffey, George Coffey, Patrick J. McCall and Richard Ashe King, joined it. Yeats's aim was to create a genuine national literature that could be de-Anglicizing and instrumental in arousing nationalism in the Irish people. He did not like the poetry of the Young Ireland Society as it was an example of bad verse, unable to reach the standard set by him. "The great number", he writes in the Autobiographies, "of those who joined my society had come under the seal of Young Ireland at that age when we were all mere wax; the more ambitious had gone daily to some public library to read the bound volumes of Thomas Davis's old newspaper, and tried to see the world as Davis saw it. No philosophic speculation, no economic question of the day disturbed an orthodoxy which, unlike that of religion, had no philosophic history, and the religious bigot was glad that it should be so. Some few of the younger men were impatient and it was these younger men, more numerous in the London than in the Dublin society, who gave me support; and we had been joined

by a few older men - some personal friends of my own or my father's - who had only historic interest in Thomas Davis and his school".¹

The ideal of the National Literary Society differed from that of the Young Ireland Society in the sense that Yeats wanted to create a national literature but the Young Irelanders wanted patriotic verses to propagate their revolutionary ideas. The result of the difference of opinions was not wholesome; a dispute between Yeats and the members of the Young Ireland Society started and it took a long time before Yeats could be understood by his opponents. However, Yeats never was destructive in his criticism of the Young Ireland and he toured Ireland to persuade the people to help him in the new literary movement and, in his attempt, he came out with a great success.

But another trouble waited him and it was the return of Gavan Duffy from Australia. Gavan Duffy came to Ireland with the plan to publish a series of books written by the unpublished writers of the Young Ireland Society. Gavan Duffy's plan alarmed Yeats because, he feared, his plan to publish a series of books written by young writers would be frustrated if Duffy were allowed to go with his own scheme.

¹. *Autobiographies*, p. 205.
Duffy and Rolleston tried to persuade Fisher Unwin and his reader, Edward Garnett, to publish their series of Irish books. But Yeats wanted the publication of original works of the young writers and the majority of writers ably supported him. However, the controversy ended by the efforts of Edward Garnett who suggested that Fisher Unwin would publish a series of Irish books offered by both the parties. Both Duffy and Yeats agreed to the suggestion. Fisher Unwin published a few good books which included Dr. Hyde's *A Short History of Gaelic Literature* and Standish O'Grady's *The Bog of Stars*.

Despite his active participation in the public activities Yeats could not write poetry which we can call modern. The reason is that he still believed in the mysteriousness of art and poetry and ignored the importance of intellect in their creation. In the essay *The Moods* he wrote: "everything that can be seen, touched, measured, explained, understood, argued over, is to the imaginative artist nothing more than a means, for he belongs to the invisible life, and delivers its ever new and ever ancient revelation ... We hear much of his need for the restraint of reason, but the only restraint he can obey is the mysterious instinct that has made him an artist, and that teaches him to discover immortal moods in mortal desires, an undecaying hope in our trivial ambitions, a divine love in sexual passion".  

In another essay he expressed his love for thinness and faint impressions: "I see, indeed, in the arts of every country those faint lights and faint colours and faint outlines and faint energies which many call "the decadence" and which I, because I believe that the arts lie dreaming of things to come, prefer to call the autumn of the body".\(^1\) It is this desire for faint colours and faint energy that mars the vitality of the poems written by him in the eighteen-nineties. In the poem *The Hosting of the Sidhe*, the first poem in the volume *The Wind Among the Reeds*, there is the expression of faint love.

"And Niamh calling Away, come away:  
Empty your heart of its mortal dream.  
The winds awaken, the leaves whirl round,  
Our cheeks are pale, our hair is unbound,  
Our breasts are heaving, our eyes are agleam  
Our arms are waving, our lips are apart".\(^2\)

*The Hosting of the Sidhe*, written under the influence of the poets of the Rhymers' Club, is marked with Spenserian echoes. Probably it would have been a good poem if it were written in the fifteenth or sixteenth century. The phrases like "mortal dream", "pale cheeks", "heaving", "arms waving", "lips apart" and "hair unbound", make the

---

poem escapist in tone. The dream of and love for another world is evident in 'The Hosting of the Air', where the lover finds himself among the fairies only to fall in love and be deceived in the end:

"O' Driscoll scattered the cards
And out of his dream awoke.
Old men and young men and young girls
Were gone like drifting smoke."

It is generally said that it was Maud Conne's rejection of his proposal that contributed to the gloom of the love poems written in the eighteen-nineties but we must keep in mind the fact that poems on Maud Gonne, written in the twentieth century, do not have much of romanticism. Actually, frustration in love had little to do with the quality of his poetry as he had already formulated the theory that poetry should be about faint colours and faint energy and that it should be dreamy and wishful in expression. The poems of The Wind Among the Reeds can be remembered for the sustained use of symbols and the culmination of the style Yeats learnt at the Rhymers' Club. They bear testimony to Yeats's declaration in the following quatrains:

1. Collected Poems, pp. 63-64.
2. Ibid., p. 64.
3. A.N. Jeffares, Introduction to the Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. XV, (Macmillan); also Yeats : Man and the Poet, p. 229
A.G. Stock, W.B. Yeats, His poetry and Thought, pp. 50-51.
"God loves dim ways of glint and gleam
To please him well my rhyme must be
A dyed and figured mystery,
Thought hid in thought, dream hid in dream".¹

Yeats found that the Victorian poetry could provide him only with a tradition exhausted in imagery, phraseology, subject-matter and style. Symons introduced him to the French symbolist poetry and despite his scanty knowledge of the French language, he got himself acquainted with the poetry of Mallarmé, Verlaine and Count Villiers de L'Isle Adam. Acknowledging his indebtedness to Arthur Symons Yeats writes in his Autobiographies: "He was making those translations from Mallarmé and Verlaine, from Calderon, from Sain John of the Cross, which are the most accomplished metrical translations of our time, and I think that those from Mallarmé may have given elaborate form to my verses of those years to the latter poems of The Wind Among the Reeds to The Shadowy Waters, while Villiers de L'Isle Adam had shaped whatever in my Rosa Alchemica Pater had not shaped."²


But Yeats was too original to be a carbon copy of the French symbolists; whereas the French symbolists had private symbols, Yeats took symbols from Irish mythology and later, as Bowra has pointed out, he made symbols of real persons. He made the distinction between the symbolist and the fragmentary symbolist and held that the symbolist uses symbols in a systematic way, while the fragmentary symbolist uses symbols without any system or order. In his occultist experiments he found that symbols had effects independent of their sources or the intention of the conscious; this discovery led to the idea that behind every symbol there are the forces of elemental powers and that the use of symbols evokes indefinable feelings in the reader:

"All art that is not mere story-telling, or mere protraiture, is symbolic, and has the purpose of those symbolic talismans which mediaeval magicians made with complex colours and forms, and bade their patients ponder daily, and guard with holy secrecy; for it entangles in complex colours and forms, a part of the Divine Essence".  

All sounds, all colours, all forms, either because of long association, evoke indefinable and yet precise emotions, or, as I prefer to think, call down among us

certain disembodied powers, whose footsteps over our hearts we call emotions; and when sound, and colour, and form are in a musical relation, a beautiful relation to one another, they become as it were, one sound, one colour, one form, and evoke an emotion that is made out of their distinct evocations and yet is one emotion. ¹

Yeats divides the symbols into two broad categories, though the division is arbitrary and overlapping. In the first category are the emotional symbols which evoke only emotions, and in the second category are the intellectual symbols which evoke "ideas alone, or ideas mingled with emotions."² For the appreciation of a symbolic poem, then, there is the need of intellect without which no reader can pass through the state of trance, the condition of creating poetry. "It is the intellect that decides where the reader shall ponder over the procession of symbols, and if the symbols are merely emotional, he gazes from amid the accidents and destinies of the world; but if the symbols are intellectual too, he becomes himself a part of sure intellect, and he is himself mingled with the procession".³

¹. Essays and Introductions, pp. 156-57.
². Ibid., 160.
³. Ibid., 161.
One may therefore conclude that only symbolic poetry is able to evoke the emotions and feelings of the reader and enable him to achieve the "Unity of Being", the image which unifies nations, races and individuals together. If symbolic poetry moves us more than poetry of other type, it is because our memory and mind are the part of the Great Memory and the Great Mind. The later poems of The Wind Among the Reeds Volume bear testimony to this change in Yeats in regard to the substance, rhythm and form of poetry.

In the Song of Wandering Aengus,1 Aengus, the lover in Irish mythology, is not an individual but a symbol to express the love-torn heart of the poet who wishes to,

"...pluck till time and times are done
The silver apples of the moon
The golden apples of the sun".2

The white deer of The Wanderings of Oisin is explicitly used as a symbol of the lady-love and the hound with one red ear is the lover. The "boar without bristles" is death:

2. Ibid., p. 67.
"I would that the Boar without bristles had come from the west
And had routed the sun and moon and stars out of the sky
And lay in the darkness, grunting, and turning to his rest".  

In the poem The Valley of the Black Pig, "the valley of the Black Pig", as explained by Yeats in the "Notes", is the place where there will be, according to the belief of the Irish people, the rout of the enemies of Ireland.

"In The Wind Among the Reeds," C.M. Bowra comments, "Yeats adapted the symbolist method to his own views and uses. It suited his own temperament, his deep trust in dreams and visions. It suited his belief that a poet is a kind of medium between spirit and men, a seer who interprets clues to the mystery of life. Yet, his masculine intelligence demanded a more concrete and vigorous style with a greater precision and force".  

Surely Yeats was not satisfied with his performance in The Wind Among the Reeds, despite the systematic use of symbols. The reason, he felt, was that he had failed to develop

2. Ibid., p. 526. ("Notes").
a masculine and terse style that could fully express experiences and aspirations of his life in terms of new poetry. However, there are a few poems in The Wind Among the Reeds that anticipate the style of later Yeats. The opening lines of the poem The Lover Tells of the Rose in His Heart are strikingly modern:

"The cry of a child by the roadway, the creak of a lumbering cart. The heavy steps of the ploughman, splashing the wintry mould Are wronging your image that blossoms a rose in the heart".

Into the Twilight, printed at the end of The Celtic Twilight, sings the glory of Ireland and expresses the zeal of the poet for his motherland,

"Your mother Eire is always young Dew ever shining and twilight grey".

The Valley of the Black Pig is a prophetic political poem in which the poet sees the vision of the destruction of Ireland's enemies. "All over Ireland", writes Yeats in the

2. Ibid., p. 62.
3. Ibid., p. 73.
"Notes", 1 "there are prophecies of the complete rout of the enemies of Ireland, in a certain valley of the Black Pig and these prophecies are, no doubt, now, as they were in the Fenian days, a political force. I have heard of one man who would not give any money to the Land League, because the battle could not be until the close of the century; but as a rule, periods of trouble bring prophecies of its near coming". The "Black Pig" symbolizes the elemental powers that will destroy the enemies of Ireland. Yeats, in a dream, sees the fierce fight between two armies. One of them, the enemy side, is defeated. He hears the perishing cries and hopes that the people of Ireland will be passionate men and risk their lives to execute the dream into reality.

"We who still labour by the Cromlech on the shore, The grey cairn on the hill, when day sinks drowned in dew
Being weary of the world's empires, bow down to you, Master of the still stars and of the flaming door". 2

The best poem in The Wind Among the Reeds is The Secret Rose that was first published as an introduction to the stories of The Secret Rose (1897). The "rose" here is something too vast and exalted to be expressed by words alone, and differs

2. Ibid., n. 77.
from the explanation given by Yeats in the Notes; it is sometimes eternal beauty, sometimes intellectual beauty and sometimes the blessed moment. In this poem all the three aspirations - love for Maud Gonne, poetry with its source in Irish mythology, and magic - are combined into a unity. A.N. Jeffares says: "This spiritual beauty was seen as part of Yeats's own belief that there would be revelation, due to the creation of Celtic mysteries (and a complete understanding between Yeats and Maud Gonne). Madam McBride has told me that Yeats, as well as symbolizing spiritual beauty by the Rose, intended at times to allude to her by the symbol. Thus in The Secret Rose the blending of all these aspirations is built up with a wealth of imagery".¹ The Secret Rose is an invocation to the "inviolate rose" to enfold the poet in the best hours so that he may get the blessed moment which the saints have tried to find in the "Holy Seoulchre" or the lovers have sought in beauty. The next aspiration is for the moment when the "invisible gates would open as they opened for Blake, as they opened for Boehme, as they opened for Swedenborg",² and that his "philosophy would find its manuals of devotion in all imaginative literature, and set before Irish men for special

1. A.N. Jeffares, Yeats : Man and the Poet, p. 115.
manual an Irish literature which, though made by many minds, would seem the work of a single mind, and turn our places of beauty or legendary association into holy symbols. And then follows the panorama of Irish history.

"And the king whose eyes
Saw the Pierced Hands and Roods of elder rise
In Druid vapour and make the torches dim;
Till vain frenzy awoke and he died; and him
Who met Fand walking among flaming dew
By a grey shore where the wind never blew,
And lost the world and Emer for a kiss".

At the end, Yeats is quite hopeful about the fulfilment of his aspirations:

"I, too, await
The hour of thy great wind of love and hate.
When shall the stars be blown about the sky,
Like the sparks blown out of a smithy and die?
Surely thine hour has come, thy great wind blows,
Far off, most secret, and inviolate Rosc"?

While Yeats was writing the poems of The Wind Among the Reeds and experimenting with the symbols of the Golden Dawn, another activity, by far the most important, that went

1. Autobiographies, p. 254.
2. Collected Poems, pp. 77-78.
side by side influenced much of his later poetry which is sardonic in tone and conversational in style. With all enthusiasm for Ireland he worked with Maud Gonne to make Ireland a country of his ideal. Yeats's biographers have laid much stress on Maud Gonne and maintained that Yeats's involvement in politics was just a means to win her love. Nothing can be farther from the truth. Yeats by that time had become a famous and responsible man and he knew what was right and what was wrong. For the sake of love a sincere man like him could never change his ideal. He always differed from Maud Gonne on the means of achieving the goal of national freedom; he opposed violence, bloodshed and subversive activities while Maud Gonne talked of war, bloodshed and coups. Apart from this he had a plan to establish a theatre that could produce good plays based on Irish legends and stories.


2. Professor Elimann writes: "In his plans, he later confessed self-deprecatingly, 'there was much patriotism and more desire for a fair woman ...' But we should not allow his own confession of a multiplicity of motives to blind us to the larger idealism which animated all that he did for his country". Yeats : The Man and the Masks, p. 106.
He became a member of the I.R.B., a secret organization descending from the Fenian movement. He thought of starting a movement of imagination through the I.R.B. The situation was very much encouraging. American revolutionaries had split into two parties: the Triangle and the Devoy. The Devoy accused the Triangle of the murder of Cronin. "A prominent Irish American", writes Yeats, "had been murdered for political reasons, and another Irish-American had been tried and acquitted, but was still accused by his political opponents, and the dispute had spread to London and to Ireland, and had there intermixed itself with current politics and gathered new bitterness. My committee and the majority of the Nationalist Irish societies throughout England were upon one side, and the Dublin committee and the majority of the Nationalist societies in Ireland upon the other, and feeling ran high". The young Dublin Nationalists planned a monument to Wolfe Tone. A Commemoration Association was formed but there was no acceptable president and Yeats thought if he accepted the presidency of the Commemoration Association he might be

* The freedom-fighters who were living, at that time, in America and were Irish by nationality.

1. Autobiographies, p. 353.
able to prevent a public quarrel and "so make a great central council possible"¹ Yeats, therefore, hoped for a great plan. In the words of A.N. Jeffares: "It seemed possible to Yeats that after the laying of the stone all the Irish parties could be invited to subordinate themselves to his Council of English Wolfe Tone Association which would then be, after careful re-election on a more permanent basis, the equivalent of an Irish Parliament for it would control the coming and going of the Irish members at the Westminster and would have great strength".²Yeats went to different places to deliver lectures for the collection of funds. Maud Gonne made a great success in her lecture tour and was able to recreate the national unity that was impaired by political faction.

Yeats talked to Michael Davitt, the leader of the Land League, on politics and expressed his protest against the dissensions, the lack of dignity, of the Parnellite and the anti-Parnellite parties, but found that he paid little attention to him. Yeats felt that Davitt was a man of contemplation, not of action, and that the agitation for land was to satisfy only the personal needs and not the needs of the country, and even if it were so,

1. Autobiographies, p. 354.
it was purely secondary. He philosophically interpreted the national movement as one which had then degenerated into hatred and abstraction.

The situation, therefore, demanded a project to reconcile the Parnellite and the anti-Parnellite groups by inviting them at the time of laying the foundation-stone or unveiling the statue of Wolfe Tone. The Unionists who had started agitation and changed their sides because of the over-taxation, were, also, to be persuaded to unite together. By so doing, he hoped, some wild Fenian movement might begin.

But his plan was ruined by the treacherous act of Frank Hugh O'Donnell who gave many false reports against Yeats's activities. Jeffares gives a detailed account of the episode:

"Yeats had been granted the use of a weekly column in a Dublin newspaper for the new movement, and mentioned this to O'Donnell. Within a few days, before Yeats had even brought the matter before his committee, a report of the activities of some unknown secret society appeared in the column. This had nothing to do with the new movement, and when Yeats went to visit O'Donnell, who
was in hospital after a gas explosion in his flat, his conversation was given the following day as a report of "Count Shannon", an imaginary branch of the imaginary secret society. ¹

O'Donnell's venomous pamphlet affected Yeats greatly and he abandoned the project out of bitter frustration and feeling of defeat. This failure in politics, he thought, brought him to a critical point and he did not know where to go. ²