Yeats's two essays *Poetry and Tradition* and *Synge and the Ireland of his Time* express the workings of his mind during the critical years of 1903-10. In the first essay, written in 1907, Yeats explains the reason of his absence from attending the funeral of John O'Leary. "When O'Leary died, I could not bring myself to go to his funeral, though I had been once his close-fellow-worker, for I shrank from seeing about his grave so many whose Nationalism was different from anything he had thought or that I could share."¹ What was Yeats's ideal then? The answer can be best given in his own words. "I, on the other hand, was more preoccupied with Ireland ..... and took from Allingham and Walsh their passion for country spiritism, and from Ferguson his pleasure in heroic legend, and while seeing all in the light of European literature found my symbols of expression in Ireland. One thought often possessed me very strongly. Now from the influence, mainly the personal influence of William Morris, I dreamed of enlarging hate, till we had come to hate with a passion

¹. *Essays and Introductions*, p. 246.
of patriotism what Morris and Ruskin hated ... A new belief seemed coming that could be so simple and demonstrable and above all so mixed into the common scenery of the world, that it would set the whole man on fire and liberate him from a thousand obediencies and complexities. We were to forge in Ireland a new sword on our old traditional anvil for that great battle that must in the end re-establish the old, confident, joyous world ... All who have any old traditions have something of aristocracy, but we had opposing us from the first, though not strongly from the first, a type of mind which had been without it in that of Davis, and which has made a new nation out of Ireland that was once old and full of memories”.

The ideal of uniting Ireland through literature was certainly a romantic ideal. In the beginning of the twentieth century Yeats found that the concept of romantic Ireland was gradually waning and it was being replaced by such movements that had no heroic ideals and cared little for the aristocracy and its harmonious relation to peasantry. The social and political changes that took place after Parnell's death, especially the rise of the middle class which was anti-Parnellite, disillusioned and embittered Yeats. This feeling of disillusionment and bitterness is

expressed in the essay *Synge and the Ireland of his Time*. Defending Synge Yeats referred to Davis's ideas which were, also, his own ideas. "He (Davis) and his school imagines the Soldier, the Orator, the Patriot, the Poet, the Chieftain, and above all the Peasant; and these as celebrated in essays and songs and stories, possessed so many virtues that no matter how England, who as Mitchel says, 'had the ear of the world', might slander us, Ireland, even though she could not come out at the world's other ear, might go her way unleashed".¹

As Yeats retired from active politics he took the responsibilities of the Irish "fili". Eleanor Knott makes the distinction between the bard and the "fili" in her book *Irish Classical Poetry*. The bard, according to her, is simply a poet and versifier, and the "fili" is a poet and guardian of the traditional knowledge. "According to the early metrical tracts", She writes, "the bard is simply a poet and versifier; the "fili" a poet, a scholar and guardian of traditional knowledge; he is especially a prophet and a seer and can wield supernatural powers. In short, he somewhat resembles in his functions the druid of pre-Christian Gaul".²

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The Volume Responsibilities, as John Untereeker has pointed out, consists of supernatural responsibilities, social responsibilities, personal responsibilities and aesthetic responsibilities. But we must remember the fact that all these responsibilities are the offshoots of the responsibilities of the "fili".

The Grey Rock, the first poem in the volume Responsibilities, defines Yeats's position as a "fili" in the Irish society. It is closely related to All Things Can Tempt Me where he regrets his obsession with the politics of his country and love of Maud Gonne, that drew him away from the responsibilities of a poet:

"When I was young
I had not given a penny for a song
Did not the poet sing it with such airs
That one believed he had a sword upstairs;
Yet would be now, could I but have my wish,
Colder and dumber and deafer than a fish".

In *The Grey Rock* Yeats, through an allegory, elaborates the theme of *All Things Can Tempt Me*. He invokes the dead poets of the Rhymers' Club with whom he learnt his trade. Those poets never made a compromise in their defence of poetry:

"You kept the Muses' sterner laws,
And unrepenting faced your ends
And therefore earned the right..."¹

Side-by-side goes the story of Aoife and her distress. She lodges a complaint against her lover, a poet, who is dead now. She narrates to the gods the sorrowful story of her love that in the battle between the Irish king and the Danes her lover, being an Irishman, was on the king's side. As she had bestowed immortality on him for two hundred years, she gave him a pin that could make him invisible. The poet, her lover, drove the Danes away by his shouting:

"When this day
Murrough, the king of Ireland's son,
Foot after foot was giving way,
He and his best troops back to back
Had perished there, but the Danes ran
Stricken with panic from the attack,
The shouting of an unseen man"²

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¹. Collected Poems, p. 117.
². Ibid., p. 117.
But soon he found that his king was wounded and this stirred his heart. Out of emotion he forgot the words of Aoife and threw down the pin to fight physically with the Danes. Consequently he was killed in the battle and Aoife, now, is bereft of her lover. The allegorical meaning is that Aoife is the goddess of poetry and her lover is the poet. The gift of the goddess is the pin, the symbol of poetry, that makes the poet an invisible warrior. The poet encourages the men of his country by his words. But as soon as he discards the "pin", he betrays the goddess of poetry and suffers the tragic end.

The lines printed in italics, addressed to the poets of the Rhymers' Club, defend Yeats's position. His countrymen demand from him active participation in the politics of his country and, on the other hand, being a poet, he cannot betray the goddess of poetry and he must remain true to his faith. In the concluding stanza, where both the stories of Aoife and of the poet unite, Yeats clarifies his position:

"I have kept my faith, though faith was tried, To that rock-born, rock-wandering foot, And the world's altered since you died, And I am in no good repute With the loud host before the sea, That think sword-strokes were better meant
Than lover's music - let that be,
So that the wandering foot's content".¹

Here Yeats's duty to his country and to poetry is well-defined; he is primarily a poet, and therefore, he should serve his country with poetry. He cannot use the "sword-strokes" as desired by the "loud host" (meaning his countrymen) and, also, he cannot entirely agree with the members of the Rhymers' Club that he must obey the sterner laws of art (meaning the principle of art for art's sake); he arrives at the conclusion that his poetry should serve the needs of his people and his country.

The poem entitled Introductory Rhymes² in the earlier editions, is the other side of Yeats's views on the functions of the poet. He counts the heroic men of his family - the Dublin merchant, the country scholar, the soldier, the Butler and "the old merchant skipper that leaped overboard / After a ragged hat in Biscay Bay". He regrets that he has no son to continue the tradition of his family; all that he has produced is a book of poems. How can a poet be bold enough to make a poem on his family-history? The intention of Yeats is not to praise the notable figures of his family, though a superficial reading of the poem leads us to conclude like that, but to show that he belongs

¹ Collected Poems, p. 119.
² Ibid., p. 113.
to the passionate, reckless and heroic men and that he takes pride in serving his country with a book of poems.

The political poems of the volume *Responsibilities* illustrate the viewpoint expressed in *The Grey Rock*; they are the outcome of the poet's defence of the "ingenious lovely things" and of "the bitter and violent men". September 1913, *To a Wealthy Man* and *To a Friend* were written during the controversy over the pictures of Sir Hugh Lane. In the controversy Yeats saw an utter disregard to art and poetry, the means by which old romantic Ireland could be revived. He had already faced the trouble over the staging of Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*. He was really indignant at the lack of understanding of the *Playboy* and wrote the bitter poem, *On Those that Hated the Playboy of the Western World*:

"Once, when midnight smote the air,
Eunuchs ran through Hell and met
On every crowded street to stare
Upon great Juan riding by:
Even like these to rail and sweat
Staring upon his sinewy thigh"\(^1\)

A passage in the Diary kept in 1909 has much relevance to the poem.

\(^1\) *Collected Poems*, p. 124.
"The root of it all is that the political class in Ireland - the lower-middle class from whom the patriotic associations have drawn their journalists and their leaders for the last ten years - have suffered through the cultivation of hatred as the one energy of their movement, a deprivation which is the intellectual equivalent to a certain surgical operation. Hence the shrillness of their voices. They contemplate all creative power as the eunuchs contemplate Don Juan as he passes through Hell on the white horse".¹

An Appointment² is a beautiful poem written on the injustice done to Hugh Lane. Hugh Lane was refused the post of the curator of the Dublin Museum by Lord Aberdeen and Augustus Birrel, then, the Chief Secretary of Ireland. Yeats begins the poem with the mood of disappoint:

"Being out of heart with government
I took a broken root to fling".²

But the sight of a squirrel gives him the consolation that those who have freer spirit and mind do not need government appointment.

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1. Autobiographies, p. 486.
"Nor the tame will, nor timid brain
Nor heavy knitting of the brow
Bred that fierce tooth and cleanly limb.
And threw him up to laugh on the bough
No government appointed him".¹

Both the poems are a prelude to the poems written on the controversy over Sir Hugh Lane's Pictures. The object of Yeats's attack in the Hugh Lane pictures is the middle class. The leaders of the middle class in the beginning of the twentieth century were Martin Murphy and Tim Healy. Murphy and Healy belonged to the clan from Bantry, Co. Cork. They were not particularly closely associated with the Land League but they actively participated in the religious, communal, economic and social activities of the boycott. After Parnell's divorce case the "Sullivan gang", under the leadership of Healy and patronage of Murphy, attacked Parnell on ethical grounds and thus incurred the displeasure of Yeats.²

Then followed the great Dublin Lock-out in 1913. The Dublin employers, under the leadership of Martin Murphy, tried to starve the Dublin workers into submission in order to break the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union of which Jim Larkin was the leader. Yeats could not remain

¹. Collected Poems, p. 141.
silent on the issue and criticised the police, the press and the clergy. He wrote a letter to Larkin's Irish Worker.

"I do not complain of Dublin's capacity for fanaticism whether in priest or layman, for you cannot have strong feeling without that capacity, but neither those who directed the police nor the editors of our newspapers can plead fanaticism. They are supposed to watch over our civil liberties, and I charge the Dublin Nationalist newspapers with deliberately arousing religious passion to break up the organization of the working men, with appealing to mob law day after day, with publishing the names of working men and their wives for purposes of intimidation.

And I charge the Unionist Press of Dublin and those who directed the police with conniving at this conspiracy. I want to know why the Daily Express which is directly and indirectly inciting Ulster to rebellion in defence of what it calls "the liberty of the subject" is so indifferent to that liberty here in Dublin that it has not made one editorial comment, and I ask the Irish Times why a few sentences at the end of an article, too late in the week to be of any service, has been the measure of its love for civil liberty?
I want to know why there were only (according to the Press reports) two policemen at King's bridge on Saturday when Mr. Sheely Skeffington was assaulted and a man prevented from buying a ticket for his own child? There had been tumults every night at every Dublin station, and I can only assume that the police authorities wish those tumults to continue.

I want to know why the mob at North Wall and elsewhere were permitted to drag children from their parents' arms, and by what right one woman was compelled to open her box and show a marriage certificate; I want to know by what right the police have refused to accept charges against rioters; I want to know who has ordered the abrogation of the most elementary rights of the citizens, and why authorities who are bound to protect everyman in doing that which he has a legal right to do - even though they have to call upon all the forces of the Crown - have permitted the Ancient Order of Hibernians to besiege Dublin, taking possession of the railway stations like a foreign army.

Prime Ministers have fallen and Ministers of state have been impeached for less than this. I demand that the coming Police Inquiry shall be so widened that we may get to the bottom of a conspiracy, whose like has not been seen in any English-speaking town during living memory. Intrigues
have met together somewhere behind the scenes that they might turn the religion of Him who thought it hard for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven into (sic) an oppression of the poor". Commenting on the letter Conor Cruise O'Brien remarks: "The events of the Dublin Lock-out including the events which Yeats described - aroused strong emotions and there can be no doubt that Yeats's indignation was genuine and that it sprang, in part, from those human feelings which when we find them inconvenient, we call "humanitarian zeal". Yet as Hone suggests, feelings of this kind would hardly by themselves explain the phenomenon of the letter. There is no reason to suppose that Yeats was either peculiarly accessible, or peculiarly resistant to such feelings. He could, like most other politically-minded people, modulate the expression of such feelings - and perhaps even to some extent, the feeling themselves - in accordance with his judgment of the social and political context which the "crimes" or "regrettable incidents", as the case might be, occurred ... It is true that he became more conservative and more than conservative - as he grew older, but a conservative, aristocratic, pattern had already, by 1913,

become quite distinct. The concern about the "oppression of the poor" in this letter does not fit more easily into this pattern than the apparent Christian piety of the last sentence fits into the pattern of Yeats's religious ideas".  

There can be no other remark farther from truth than this. How could Yeats, so much against empiricism, logical thinking and calculations, be so cold-hearted and calculative? O'Brien must have looked over the poems on the Easter Rising. Men like MacBride, Pearse, Connolly and MacDonagh who were earlier considered by Yeats to be just common men became the great Irish heroes. If the letter of Yeats does not fit into the framework as envisaged by O'Brien, 


2. In an article Patrick Cosgrave makes the following comments on O'Brien's observations: "It is my belief that his (O'Brien's) approach to Yeats is, in fact the reverse of historical; that while his apparent ignorance of Yeats's poetics disqualified him from his undertaking before the start, it is primarily as a narrator of fact that he is found wanting ... There is, in fact, no evidence whatever to suggest that Yeats's motives for writing the letter were other than the humanitarian ones stated in it".

how can the poems on Easter Rising, the Civil War and the plays like *Cathleen-ni-Houlihan*, *Countess Cathleen*, *The Unicorn from the Stars* and *The Pot of Broth*, to name a few, fit into that framework? O'Brien must be aware of the fact that genuine feeling for humanity does not make a sincere poet, like Yeats, a propagandist. Yeats could never write a propagandist letter against the grain of his poetry. And the charge of O'Brien that Yeats's love for aristocracy made him a ruthless man does not hold true for, Yeats's ideal was Sidney who had allowed his soldier to drink the water brought for him when he was dying in the battlefield.

After the Dublin Lock-out came the controversy over the site of the gallery for Sir Hugh Lane's rare collection of modern French pictures. Hugh Lane wanted the pictures to be suitably housed by the Corporation. His demand for the bridge site across the Liffey met with popular opposition. Lane's chief critic was the *Independent* of which William Martin Murphy was the proprietor. In him Yeats saw a great enemy to the "Unity of Culture". "Yeats chose to regard", writes J. Hone, "Martin Murphy a man of distinguished character and appearance, to whose energy in Industrial enterprise Dublin was under considerable debt, as a representative type of the middle class which had begun to rise into power under the shadow of the Land League".
and kindred agitations. This Murphy certainly was not, even though he was ignorant of art and allowed his newspaper too much latitude in abuse". In all the three events - The Playboy controversy, the Parnell controversy and the Hugh Lane pictures controversy - Yeats saw the middle class inimical to his plans of bringing the "Unity of Culture" by means of the literary renascence. "In the thirty years or so during which I have been reading Irish newspaper, three public controversies have stirred my imagination. The first was the Parnell controversy. There were reasons to justify a man's joining either party, but there were none to justify, on one side or on the other, lying accusations forgetful of past service, a frenzy of detraction. And another was the dispute over The Playboy. There may have been reasons for opposing as for supporting that violent, laughing thing, though I can see the one side only, but there cannot have been any for the lies, for the unscrupulous rhetoric spread against it in Ireland, and from Ireland to America. The third prepared for the corporation's refusal of a building for Sir Hugh Lane's famous collection of pictures ... These controversies, political, literary and artistic, have shown that neither religion nor politics can of itself create minds with enough

1. J. Hone W.B. Yeats, p. 265.
to make a nation ... Religious Ireland - and the pious Protestants of my childhood were signal examples - thinks of divine things as a round of duties separated from life and not as an element that may be discovered in all circumstance and emotion, while political Ireland sees the good citizen but as a man who holds to certain opinions and not as a man of good will. Against all this we have but a few educated men and the remnant of an old traditional culture among the poor. Both were stronger forty years ago, before the rise of our new middle class which made its first display during the nine years of the Parnellite split, showing how base at moments of excitement are minds without culture".¹

The first of the series is To a Wealthy Man, written in 1912. Yeats's letter to Sir Hugh Lane explains the background of the poem.

January, (1913) 18, Woburn Buildings

My dear Lane,

Here is the poem. If it is not politic tell me frankly. If you think it is politic I will try and see Hone to see if fitting publication and comment could be made

in the Irish Times. I have tried to meet the argument in Lady Ardilaun's letter to somebody, her objection to giving because of Home Rule and Lloyd George, and still more to meet the general argument of people like Ardilaun that they should not give unless there is a public demand. I shall quite understand if you think it would be unwise to draw attention to the possible slightness of "Paudeen's" (little Patrick) desire for any kind of art. I left Dublin nearly a month ago and have no idea how the fund is or what has occurred. I kept the poem longer than I intended to make some slight changes.

Yours ever
W.B. Yeats".  

The poem referred to in the letter is To a Wealthy Man which is a request to Lord Ardilaun who had argued that money should not be given unless there was a clear public demand for the project, Yeats's position was just the opposite; according to him there should not be any consultation with the common people when a great work was to be done. In the poem he refers to three instances, as described in Castiglione's The Courtier, that Duke Erode did not consult

the onion-sellers to stage the five plays of Plautus, that Guidabaldo, the Duke of Urbino, did not seek advice from the shepherds when he made the "grammar school of courtesies", and that Cosimo de Medici did not care for the public opinion when he commissioned the architect, Michelozzo, to design the library of St. Mark in Florence.

"What cared Duke Erocle, that bid
His mummers to the market-place,
What th' onion-sellers thought or did
So that his Plautus set the pace
For the Italian comedies ?
And Guidabaldo, when he made
That grammar school of courtesies
Where wit and beauty learned their trade
Upon Urbino's windy hill
That he might learn the shepherd's will.
And when they drove out Cosimo,
Indifferent how the rancour ran,
He gave the hours they had set free
To Michelozzo's latest plan
For the San Marco Library". 1

At the end of the poem, Yeats makes a passionate appeal to the prospective donor to give up the ways of Paudeens and Biddies and contribute generously for art and culture.

"Look up in the sun's eye and give
What the exultant heart calls good
That some new day may breed the best
Because you gave, not what they would
But the right twigs for an eagle's nest".¹

Although the poem was meant for Lord Ardilaun,
William Martin Murphy took exception to it and started a
severe and vitriolic attack against Yeats. J. Hone writes
about the incident: "The Paudeens", however, held the
floor; one man compared the pictures to the Trojan horse
which destroyed a city, and Lane and his friends, rich and
poor, were described as "self-seekers", "self-advertisers",
"picture-dealers", "roll-logging cranks", and "fanatics".²

The counter-reply of Yeats was more heated; it
was the poem September 1913. The bland tone of 'To a
Wealthy Man' is abandoned and an ironical and bitter tone
takes its place. The "Paudeens" are advised to multiply
their money ("add the half pence to the pence") as they
are destined to do so. The poet regrets that, now, Ireland
is devoid of the heroic men who never bothered about saving
money when the country was in need of it. They sacrificed
their lives for the noble cause of Ireland but their noble
and heroic deeds have no value for the Paudeens:

2. W.B. Yeats, p. 266.
"Was it for this the wild geese spread
The grey wing upon every tide;
For this that all blood was shed
For this Edward Fitzgerald died
And Robert Emmet and Wolfe Tone,
All that delirium of the brave"?¹

The word "this", probably the most important word in this passage (it is repeated three times), expresses Yeats's distress over the Paudeens' (the middle class) apathetic attitude towards the noble cause of Ireland for which the brave and delirious (in the eyes of Murphy and his group) sacrificed their lives. Yeats had hoped that the people of Ireland would follow the examples of Emmet, Fitzgerald and Tone but now their attitude makes him pessimistic; the chances are bleak:

"They weighed so lightly what they gave.
But let them be, they're dead and gone,
They're with O'Leary in the grave".²

To a Friend and Paudeen, as Dr. Rajan has pointed out, assert the artist's pride and solitariness against the middle class people.³ To a Friend is a consolation to

¹ Collected Poems, p. 121.
² Ibid., p. 121.
³ B. Rajan, W.B. Yeats: A Critical Introduction, p. 73.
Lady Gregory suggesting her to keep quiet and not to care the least for the failure in her attempts to help Hugh Lane as it is difficult to compete with the shameless people.

"Now all the truth is out,
Be secret and take defeat
From any brazen throat
For how can you compete,
Being honour bred, with one
Who, were it proved he lies,
Were neither shamed in his own
Nor in his neighbours' eyes"?¹

The best thing, therefore, is to accept defeat and

"Be secret and exult
Because of all things known
That is most difficult".²

The concluding lines of To a Friend, though meant to console Lady Gregory, console all those who have worked to no purpose and are able to take defeat without complaint.

Paudeen is the vision of the artist's triumph. Indignant at the obscure spite of the Paudeens the poet stumbles through the stones and thorn-trees and reaches a

2. Ibid., p. 122.
high windy place. Suddenly all the confusion and disorder vanish and he sees the bright morning. Now he realizes the fact,

"That on the lonely height where all are in
God's eye
There cannot be, confusion of our sound forgot,
A single soul that lacks a sweet crystalline cry". ¹

The phrase "a sweet crystalline cry" stands for the artistic creation and as the Paudeens lack that cry, they have no place in God's Kingdom.

To a Shade,² the last of the series, is charged with bitterness and anger. By juxtaposition Yeats presents the contrast between the people in Parnell's time and the people in 1913. The shade addressed to is the ghost of Parnell who became a victim of Tim Healy's criticism. If the ghost of Parnell happens to visit Dublin he, the poet advises, should not stay long in the city as the world has changed much - "I wonder if the builder (of Parnell's monument) has been paid". The natural beauty of Dublin is the same as it was in Parnell's time but now the people

２. Ibid., p. 123.
have degenerated too much. A man, Sir Hugh Lane, very much like Parnell, "has been driven from the place". There is a violent hostility to the men of "loftier thought", "sweeter emotion" and "gentle blood" and Ireland is not a fit place for noble men, being ruled by the greasy people. The poem ends with a bitter and sardonic note:

"Go, unquiet wanderer,
And gather the Glasnevin coverlet
About your head till the dust stops your ear
The time for you to taste of that salt breath
And listen at the corners has not come:
You had enough of sorrow before death -
Away, away! You are safer in the tomb". ¹

The epilogue which closes the volume is linked with the Introductory Rhymes. Unterecker has pointed out that the poem A Coat "brings the section to a formal end with its announcement that Yeats will henceforth walk naked and the epilogue ("While I, from that reed-throated whisper") pulls the entire section into organic unity". ² In the epilogue the supremacy of aristocracy and art is asserted. Tired of the quarrels with the hostile multitude of the middle-class, Yeats takes shelter at Coole. Lady Gregory's

¹. Collected Poems, p. 123.
patronage and the spiritual friendship of the poets of the Cheshire Cheese (i.e. the Rhymers' Club) give him the strength to accept his fate; now he does not care if his priceless things are defiled by base men.

"I can forgive even that wrong of wrongs
Those undreamt accidents that have made me
Seeing that Fame has perished this long while
Being but a part of ancient ceremony -
Notorious, till all my priceless things
Are but a post the passing dogs defile". 1

All these four poems - 'All Things Tempt Me, The Grey Rock, The Introductory Rhymes and The Closing Rhymes - connected to one another, define the nature of Yeats's later poetry. All Things Tempt Me conveys Yeats's resolution to get rid of active politics and the love of Maud Gonne; The Grey Rock defines his function as a poet which is that though he believes in the principles of the Rhymers' Club, he cannot be indifferent to the practical needs of life; The Introductory Rhymes expresses his love for tradition - the old Irish tradition preserved by the heroic men of ancient Irish families; and the Closing Rhymes, defining his place and attitude as a poet, shows him now as a solitary man observing from a distance the events of his country, the

mirror of the world. He places himself at such a distance that his vision is neither blurred by the distance nor prejudiced by extreme nearness; he can express his opinions in the most disinterested way.

The Fisherman, written in June 1914 illustrates the poet's ideal in theme, construction and style. The fisherman is a typical Irishman but he does not exist as he is the ideal. In a dream Yeats sees him:

"The Freckled man who goes
To a grey place on a hill
In grey Connemara clothes
At dawn to cast his flies". 1

The fisherman is set against those men encountered with by the poet in his day-to-day life:

"The living men that I hate
The dead man that I loved,
The craven man in his seat
The insolent unreproved
And no knave brought to book
Who has won a drunken cheer". 2

2. Ibid., p. 166.
And the worst of all is the decline of poetry and art in Ireland,

"The beating down of the wise
And great art beaten down". 1

The ideal fisherman, like the poet, turns away from the public and climbs up to a place where the stones are mossy. Yeats resolves to write a poem about him, which will be "as cold / And passionate as the dawn". 2

The People, on the surface, seems to be the poet's confession of the guilty feeling that he should have devoted his valuable time to poetry alone:

"I might have used the one substantial right
My trade allows: chosen my company
And chosen what scenery pleased me best". 3

He is reproved by Maud Gonne for she never complained of the people despite the wrongs done to her:

"The drunkards, pilferers of public funds
All the dishonest crowd I had driven away,
When my luck changed and they dared meet my face,

1. Collected Poems, p. 166-
2. Ibid., p. 167-
3. Ibid., p. 169.
Crawled from obscurity, and set upon me
Those I had served and some that I had fed;
Yet never have I, now nor any time,
Complained of the people". ¹

But Yeats does not agree with Maud Gonne on this point and expresses his intention that, being a poet, he must have his say on public events that move his mind and heart:

"All I could reply
Was: You that have not lived in thought but deed,
Can have the purity of a natural force,
But I, whose virtues are the definitions
Of the analytic mind, can neither close
Thy eye of the mind nor keep my tongue from speech"²

The Easter poems bear testimony to the ideas expressed in the poems just mentioned. They express his sincere feelings caused by the sacrifice of the Irish leaders in their armed revolt against the British rule. He wrote to Lady Gregory on 11 May 1916:

My dear Lady Gregory,

The Dublin tragedy has been a great sorrow and anxiety. Cosgrave, whom I saw a few months ago in connection with the Municipal Gallery project and found our best

2. Ibid., pp. 170.
supporter, has got many years' imprisonment and to-day I see that an old friend Henry Dixon - unless there are two of the name - who began with me the whole work of the literary movement has been shot in a barrack yard without trial of any kind. I have little doubt there have been many miscarriages of justice. The wife of a Belgian Minister of war told me a few days ago that three British officers had told her that the command of the British army in France should be made over to the French generals and that French generals have told her that they await with great anxiety the result of the coming German attack on the English lines because of the incompetence of the English Higher Command as a whole. Haig however they believed in - he was recommended by the French for the post. I see therefore no reason to believe that the delicate instrument of Justice is being worked with precision in Dublin. I am trying to write a poem on the men executed - "terrible beauty has been born again". If the English conservative party had made a declaration that they did not intend to rescind the Home Rule Bill there would have been no Rebellion. I had no idea that any public event could so deeply move me - and I am very despondent about the future. At the moment I feel that all the work of years has been overturned, all the bringing together of classes, all the freeing of Irish literature and criticism from politics. Maud Gonne reminds me that she saw the revived houses about O'Connell Street.
and the wounded and the dying lying about the streets, in
the first few days of the war ... Her main thought seems to
be "tragic dignity has returned to Ireland ..."¹ Yeats
personally knew the leaders who were executed in the
abortive Rising. About Pearse and Connolly, he writes:
"Three or four years after the betrayal of Parnell two
little boys, sons of a Dublin stone mason, knelt down beside
their beds and prayed that they might sacrifice their lives
for Ireland. In their early twenties I saw them occasionally;
they would come to the Abbey Theatre for some reason or
other. I think they hired it for some concert or public
meetings. The elder had founded a school for boys where
Irish heroic tales were taught, Cuchulain recommended as an
example to be followed, and was also a poet, sometimes in
Gaelic, sometimes in English ...” Then one year when I was
passing through Dublin on my way to London from Galway, where
I spent my summers, someone said, 'There is going to be
troubles - Pearse is going through Ireland preaching the
blood sacrifice - he says blood must be shed in every
generation'. Some (time) after that came the 1916 rebellion.
Several actors belonging to my theatre had part; one of the
best was killed ... Pearse wrote the night before his
execution those strange verses ignoring death..."²

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² Modern Ireland: An Address to American Audiences,
   pp. 22-23 (Ed. R. Skelton).
The Easter poems do not bear evidence, as Graham Hough puts it, that Yeats "gives the lie to some of his earlier convictions about political poetry" and that "he attempts the exaltation not of individuals, but of a people"; rather they speak of Yeats's admiration for the heroic dead of the sixteen executed leaders who grouped themselves with the heroes of the past.

The Easter 1916, the first of the Easter poems, is certainly the finest poem of the group. The opening has a comic situation. The comic figures come and go to the counters and desks of the eighteenth century houses. But the mood suddenly changes with the refrain:

"All changed, changed utterly
A terrible beauty is born"^{2}

Yeats, who had always been against bloodshed and violence, cannot but praise the passionate sacrifice of Pearse, Connolly, MacBride and MacDonagh. They are "enchanted to one stone (that reminds us of the "mossy stone" of the poem The Fisherman) that troubles the course of the human history. The change is so sudden and great that the poet doubts:

2. Collected Poems, pp. 204-5.
"was it needless sacrifice at all"? But soon he gets the answer when he realizes his duty to pay tribute to the martyrs:

"We know their dream, enough
To know they dreamed and are dead
And what if excess of love
Bewildered them till they died?
I write it out in a verse -
MacDonagh and MacBride
And Connolly and Pearse
Now in time to be
Wherever green is worn,
All changed, changed utterly
A terrible beauty is born".  

In the Sixteen Dead Men there is no questioning or doubt. Logical discussion is useless once passion has been aroused by the thought of martyrdom. The opening of the poem is like an incantation:

"0 but we talked at large before
The sixteen men were shot
But who can talk of give and take
What should be and what not
While those dead men are loitering there
To stir the boiling pot".

1. Collected Poems, po. 204-5.
2. Ibid., p. 205.
3. Ibid., p. 205.
In the second stanza he rejects the argument that the Irish people should wait till Germany is defeated:

"You say that we should still the land
Till Germany's overcome;
But who is there to argue that
Now Pearse is deaf and dumb?
And is their logic to outweigh
MacDonagh's long thumb? "

The poem concludes with associating the Easter martyrs with Lord Edward and Wolfe Tone, the great leaders of the past:

"How could you dream they'd listen
That have an ear alone
For those new comrades they have found,
Lord Edward and Wolfe Tone
Or meddle with our give and take
That converse bone to bone".

The Rose Tree, the last of the rose poems, is a dialogue between Pearse and Connolly. Yeats shares the views of Pearse and Connolly that the rebellion may be unsuccessful but it will ultimately lead to the liberation of Ireland.

2. Ibid., p. 205.
3. Ibid., p. 206.
"It needs to be but watered",
James Connolly replied,
"To make the green come out again
And spread on every side,
And shake the blossom from the bud
To be the garden's pride".¹

But how to serve the rose-tree, the symbol of Ireland, when water is not available? The reply of Connolly expresses, in the most forceful way, the idea that Ireland can be liberated by the blood of the nationalist patriots:

"But where can we draw water,
Said Pearse to Connolly,
'When all the wells are parched away'?
'O plain as plain can be
There's nothing but our own red blood
Can make a right Rose Tree".²

The Easter poems outlive their time not because they glorify the Easter Rising but because they ring with personal note and a kind of rare poetic melody. The leaders whom Yeats glorifies had not impressed him before the Easter Rising. It was their selfless sacrifice that raised them high in Yeats's opinion and also the thought that he, despite all

2. Ibid., p. 206.
his willingness to be a man of action, himself could not do. They, he thinks, strove for the "Unity of Culture" by their heroic action. He, later, wrote a more complex poem The Statues to make his viewpoint more clear:

"When Pearse summoned Cuchulain to his side, What stalked through the Post Office? What intellect. What calculation, number, measurement, replied? We Irish, born 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".

Yeats here certainly associates Pearse with those persons (perhaps including himself also) who seek for the "Unity of Culture" and the "Unity of Being" ("a plummet-measured face"). Yeats's admiration of the executed persons is more for their heroic ideals and nobility of cause. In contrast with them is Con Markievicz, the leader of the crowd, whom Yeats had met in her youth and admired her very much. Later, she became a Bohemian much to the dislike of Yeats. He could never pardon her for her way of life, ideas and activities, and even her participation in the Easter Rising did not convince him that she was inspired by any heroic ideals.

He wrote about her in a disparaging manner:

2. Ibid., pp. 375-76.
"That woman's days were spent
In ignorant good-will
Her nights in argument
Until her voice grew shrill."

In another poem he disapproved of her activities;

"She that but little patient knew
From childhood on, had now so much
A grey gull lost its fear and flew
Down to her cell and there alit,
And there endured her fingers' touch
And from her fingers ate its bit.

Did she in touching that lone wing
Recall the years before her mind
Became a bitter, an abstract thing,
Her thought some popular enmity:
Blind and leader of the blind
Drinking the foul ditch where they lie."

Despite and considerably because of their political background the Easter poems are a great achievement of Yeats. The one reason that gives these poems a hard core and tangibility is the fact that they were inspired by the facts of contemporary Irish history and his involvement in

2. Ibid., pp. 206-7.
and gradual detachment from them. There is nothing of vagueness, dreaminess and mysteriousness of his early style. Clarity, precision, brevity, and simplicity are the characteristics of these poems and they anticipate the mature style of *The Second Coming* and *Sailing to Byzantium*. The rose symbol which to some extent is vague in his early poems, is distinct and well-defined in *The Rose Tree*. The most remarkable poem is the *Easter 1916* which, echoing the *September 1913*, depicts in the most poetic way the change brought about by the leaders of the Rising. The central imagery of the poem, apart from its beautiful refrain "a terrible beauty is born", is the "stone" troubling the living stream, which explains why Yeats glorifies those leaders. The leaders are "enchanted to a stone" (meaning the heroic ideals) and though other things change minute by minute, they remain steadfast to their purpose.