Autobiography has been over the decades redefined by the people who have attempted to reflect their self in this art -- so much so that over the years, the autobiographical idiom has changed shape altogether by freeing itself from conventions and canons. The changes took place because of the fact, that every poet or autobiographer is driven by the urge to express himself and this urge is conditioned by the psychological factors within himself which eventually go back to the life outside him.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, the people, disillusioned by democracy, turned towards extreme forms of social and political consciousness. Some of the greatest literary figures of this century -- Yeats, Pound, Eliot were drawn towards the concept of fascism, which they believed was the only solution to the social and political turmoil in the world. On the other hand, Spender, Day-Lewis and Auden were attracted by communism in the thirties. They were of the opinion that individual sensibility could not change society by itself. Only concerted political and social measures taken by everyone in the society could be of some use. Day-Lewis, Spender and Auden thought the Marxist ideology would be beneficial to the people. Therefore, they were interested mainly in the society and how to benefit it. On the other hand, Yeats, Pound and Eliot were only
interested in the society as long as it allowed the arts to flourish. Their main interest was in the arts and they tried to improve or benefit the society so as to gain a good background for their writings.

Spender and Day-Lewis, were compelled to accept the pressing problems of their times. So, they could not understand the indifference and rejection of the present moment by poets like Yeats and Eliot, who were more concerned with the spiritual crisis in the modern society. Yeats, to some extent was involved with the events in Ireland, and wrote poems like "The Second Coming," "An Irish Airman foresees his death." But, he did not think the political events to be an integral part of his life and poetry. Spender brings out this difference between the older generation of poets and his contemporaries by remarking very aptly:

Instead of being horrified at the chaos of the Waste Land and contrasting it with a prodigious tradition of the past; instead of trying to cure and revolutionise it, they accepted it as the background of their lives, and allowed its rubbish and its plants to sprout through their poetry.¹

However, they all had one thing in common and it was their anti-democratic attitude. They rebelled against the present government and wanted an order which would provide discipline and hardness in their lives as well as in their writings. These feelings were produced in these poets, to some extent, by the effects of the First World War. Yeats

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had also experienced the Irish Rebellion along with the two Wars and was greatly affected by the horrors and atrocities afflicted on the masses. Similarly, Day-Lewis and Spender were also affected greatly by the two World Wars and the Spanish War. Their experiences of the wars is reflected in their writings. These experiences played a major role in shaping their values and judgements about aesthetics and literature. Stephen Spender says in *Life and the Poet*, "the greatest modern poet would be the most anti-poetic and brutal phenomena... and revealing them as expressions of man's spirit even in being denials of man's spirit."²

If we look at Yeats's poetry, we realize that it was prompted by his beliefs and moral consciousness. His energies diverged primarily in three directions in the form of occultism, in the form of personality and a passionate belief in nationalism. But nationalism, for him, had a wider meaning which did not include politics. As Ronsley puts it, "he associated the spirit with universal human values and emotions and made it into their symbol, but the political principle could be no more than a passing and provincial interest."³

Yeats was of the firm opinion that poetry should not be produced by some external emotion such as the war, as these emotions could not be re-created or re-experienced and so remained outside the poet's realm. He also condemned
Wilfred Owen's war-poems on the ground that "passive suffering is no a theme for poetry" and called his poetry, "all blood, dirt, and sucked sugar-stick." John Bayley says about Yeats's attitude:

How could poetry reside in some large general emotion outside the author's scope and control? How could the poetry be anywhere outside? It is an inflexible application of the romantic egotism that the poet's universe must be purely his own. War must be a factor in the poet's consciousness, not a public emotion.4

This was the general tendency of the aesthetes of the nineties, influenced mostly by Pater's doctrine. The modern poets, like Spender and Day-Lewis, however, believed that poetry becomes more valuable and important when it deals with realistic events. The contemporary historical events made it almost necessary for them to include these events in their poetry. This, they believed, made their poetry more clear and emotionally honest and involved the reader as well -- rather than just submerging one's self in one's private mythology like Yeats and Eliot.

Yeats, on the other hand, was more concerned with themes which were romantic.

We were the last romantics -- chose for theme Traditional sanctity and loveliness (S.P. p. 151).

The poetry that Yeats wrote during the war years was deliberately kept away from the topic of war and instead concentrated on love, sorrow, time and the changes brought about by time and also the contemporary problems in art,
literature and theatre. He thought he was too old to be personally involved in the war and implies this very explicitly in the following lines:

I think it better that in times like these
A poet's mouth be silent, for in truth
We have no gift to set a statesman right;
He has had enough of meddling who can please
A young girl in the indolence of her youth,
Or an old man upon a winter's night.5

Yeats's attitude towards life was not simple and straight. He always strove for an artistic blend of life and art. He did not want to depict mere facts. Rather, his Autobiographies is filled with instances of forgetting. These lapses of memory are of no importance in his case, as the eternal memory creating the archetype is reborn. Olney remarks:

Yeats obliterates memory-traces of this world so that he may recall the forms of another world; he forgets what passes in time so that he may remember what does not pass in eternity; and misremembering, with a fine disregard, the names, dates, and places of a merely individual life he seeks to embody in the archetypal portariture and the anecdotal artistry of the Autobiographies the very essence of being, purified now of what he in one place calls the "accident and incoherence" of existence.6

Right in the beginning, in his preface to the Autobiographies, Yeats proclaims his faith in the timeless time and not in historical time:

I have changed nothing to my knowledge; and yet it must be that I have changed many things without my knowledge; for I am writing after many years and have consulted neither friend nor letter, nor old newspaper, and describe what comes oftenest into my memory (Autobiographies, p.3).
Graham Martin affirms this when he says that the participation between Yeats and events is intimate, but principally on Yeats's own terms so that the events re-emerge in what people call Yeats's myth. Yeats realized the difference between his point of view and the modern poets. In the early thirties, he remarked about the contrast to Stephen Spender. "We are entering," he said, "the political era, dominated by consideration of political necessity which belong to your people. That will be bad enough, but there will be worse to come."  

During the thirties, the concept of the aesthetic theory underwent a change and the poets of the thirties were directly involved with the social and political condition of the time. The thirties was a period of history which, though deeply disturbed was an age of credulous faith. People believed that good times were not far ahead and they looked up to the poets "to give them a substitute for their own lost faith, or a guide to action, or a new set of values, or a sense of human purpose in an apparently mechanistic universe."  

So, the main purpose of the poet was to be a guide and a critical informer -- enriching the reader's experience. Spender says so in his autobiography, World Within World:
This attitude of the young poet with a bird's eye-view on human calamity in a world of wars and dismantled works runs the risk of becoming facilely inhuman. Auden was too human, moreover, for it to be an attitude which he could for long maintain in the face of experiences that wrung his heart. After all, the young poet does become involved.\textsuperscript{10}

The group of poets who were prominent at that time believed that they could create poetry out of the ugliness and inhumanity around them, instead of setting themselves apart from the times. In fact, they even tried to find a cure for the current social and political evils in leftist politics. Disillusioned with the Christian faith and liberalism, they turned towards Marxism -- more from a sense of idealism and a romantic concept than from a feeling of political or intellectual convictions. Consequently, their personal emotions were influenced by the external events, and their poetry often expresses "the problem of the liberal divided between his individual development and his social conscience."\textsuperscript{11}

Day-Lewis's "0 Dreams, 0 Destinations," MacNeice's "Prayer Before Birth" and Spender's "Spiritual Exercises" show how the poets developed during war. The threat of invasion and the air raids are depicted in Spender's and Day-Lewis's poems. Spender and Day-Lewis even tended to involve themselves actively in the war, unlike Yeats, by becoming officials. Day-Lewis was employed in the Ministry of Information; Louis MacNeice was a script writer in the B.B.C.; Spender was a fireman and later became a hack of a war-time in the branch of the Foreign Office.
Spender narrates the activities of the poets during the thirties in his essay, "W.H. Auden And The Poets of the Thirties." He says that their work expresses a moral conscience -- more sensitive than that of many of their contemporaries. MacNeice and Spender even went to Spain during the war. In fact, some of the poems written during this time like Auden's "Spain," Day-Lewis's "Nabara" and some poems of Spender's in The Still Centre seem to blend the personal and the public issues. According to Day-Lewis, the function of the poet was to witness and write truthfully. He wrote that the poet is committed to his time, but with certain limitations. He says, "A poet can't choose his time or his subject-matter -- but, in accepting the limitations of his time and using them as the harness of his genius, the great poet transcends it."

Stephen Spender also wrote about the relationship between art and life. According to him, "art can make clear to practical revolutionaries the historic issues which are in the deepest sense political. ... Revolution ... cannot be assisted by censoring the truths of art or artists." Though truthfulness became a near obsession with thirties poets, they tended to give a subjective and introspective outlook to the outer world in their poetry and prose writings. Spender tries to understand and explore the nature of human existence in "Spiritual Explorations." He writes:

92
Since we are what we are, what shall we be
But what we are? We are, we have
Six feet and seventy years, to see
The light, and then resign it for the grave.

We are not worlds, no, nor infinity,
We have no claims on stone, except to prove
In the invention of the human city
Our selves, our breath, our death, our love. 15

The same quest for self can be seen in Day-Lewis's "Requiem for the Living."

Oh praise man's mind that questioning why
things are
And whence, haloes the moon with a new star,
Peers into nature's heart and cons the order
there

Oh praise what makes us creatures breed and
build
Over death's void, and know ourselves
fulfilled
In that age-hallowed trinity man, woman,
child. 16

Day-Lewis was aware of the private and public issues playing an important part in his life. He wrote in his autobiography, "If any conversion to communism had been gradual and undramatic, my revulsion -- not from communism but from the self which political activity had fostered -- was almost apocalyptic. 17

After breaking up with politics, Day-Lewis realized that he was able to "explore areas of experience, previously inaccessible, which contained a greater wealth of poetic impulse and material than I had found in the area opened by the social conscience" (TBD, p.223).
The poet is drawn between the two irreconciliable conceptions of the universe, that is, materialism and idealism, according to Scarfe. He comes to the conclusion that in common terms, there must be effected a synthesis between sociology and psychology. Though Yeats always propounded poetic detachment from politics, he did get attracted by Fascism and wrote poems for O'Duffy's Blueshirts. Some of his other poems like "Easter 1916," "Sixteen Dead Men," "An "Irish Airman Foresees His Death" and "Reprisals" also speak of his interest in Irish politics.

In the same vein, Spender too expresses the belief that the self is also of importance and not only the social and political values. He says at the end of his autobiography:

that inner life of man must create his outward circumstances. Perverted love, in the form of nationalism, or class solidarity (what is called 'Communist love'), produce the forces of destruction in our time. Although we should support every outward movement for attaining peace and social improvement, it is only within the inner life that man can will himself to be a coherent whole and not a part set against another part (WWW, p.287).

Thus, we see that all the three poets created continually in their poetry and autobiography -- the image of their self. The created image passed through many phases and transformations. Their work becomes a reflection of these transformations in their personality -- of their ever changing self.
NOTES

2. Ibid., p. 51
10. Stephen Spender, *World Within World* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1951), p. 54. All subsequent quotations from the book are from this edition and will be referred by the abbreviation WWW and a page number in parentheses.
12. Ibid., p.28.
17. C. Day-Lewis, *The Buried Day* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1960), p. 222. All subsequent quotations from the book are from this edition and will be referred by the abbreviation TBD and a page number in parentheses.