CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: YEATS AND THE MODERNISTS

I

A canonical poet, a seminal playwright, a mystic, a romantic, and a pioneer of Celtic Renaissance and Irish literature, William Butler Yeats was decidedly a man of various tastes and talents. His copious literary output comprised lyrical, narrative and dramatic verses; thirty-three plays and bounteous prose comprising essays, autobiography, fiction, polemic journalism, and an ingenious, complex occult system. He also maintained a steady correspondence with his friends, family and acquaintances, illustrating therein his public and private passions. He strove to search for meaning and concord in diverse modes within his craft, between religion and literature, political and artistic milieus and also the historical, cultural and psychological meditations. Consequently, his poetic beliefs unravelled his views on a plethora of issues; exhibited myriad shifts in terms of form and content and revealed his own artistic vision, strewn across all these diverse and voluminous works. Yet, his multifariousness had an underlying continuity achieved after single-minded pursuit of unity and integrity in literature. A prominent exponent of Irish Cultural Revival, Yeats straddled over the literary milieu of the 19th and that of the early 20th century. Although a self-proclaimed "Last Romantic," he remained sensitive to all literary movements of his times especially the Victorian Romanticism and the anti-Romantic Modernism. The present study entitled Yeats as a Literary Critic: A Study of his Poetic Beliefs is an endeavour to unearth Yeats' acuity as a literary critic.

A fêted litterateur who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1923 and honorary degrees by Trinity College (1922), Oxford (1931), and Cambridge University (1933), as recognition of his capacious contribution to English Literature, Yeats exhibited his erudition and literary acumen in varied forms. An assessment of his literary achievements through the changing times brings forth his foray into various genres and movements. A celebrated poet, some of his most acclaimed collections of poems include Crossways (1889), The Rose (1893), The Wind Among the Reeds (1899), The Seven Woods (1904), The Green Helmet and Other Poems (1910), Responsibilities (1914), The Wild Swans at Coole (1919), Michael Robartes and the Dancer (1921), The Tower (1928), The Winding Stairs and Other Poems (1933), and Last Poems (1936-1939). A prolific
writer, Yeats also wrote about thirty-five prose collections including *The Celtic Twilight*, *Ideas of Good and Evil*, *A Vision*, *The Senate Speeches*, *A Packet for Ezra Pound*, *Memoirs* and *Autobiographies*. An integral part of his vast and miscellaneous output was also formed by his critical essays, articles for journals, introductions to anthologies and prefaces. Yeats also published a chronological anecdotal account of his life, in the form of *Autobiographies: The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats* comprising essays namely: *Reveries Over Childhood and Youth* (1914); *The Trembling of the Veil* (1922); *Yeats Nobel Prize Lecture*, *The Irish Dramatic Movement* (1923); *The Bounty of Sweden* (1925); *Estrangement* (1926), and *Dramatic Personae 1896-1902* (1935). His autobiography is widely regarded as a statement of his poetic theory and an account of his growth as an artist. A rather less guarded version of his life has also been published posthumously as *Memoirs*. It contains information about Yeats' journal launched in December 1908 and also the first draft of his Autobiography. Composed of a string of factual and historical accounts of people and places, these sought to capture the real essence of an assortment of topics which drew Yeats' attention over the first fifty eight years of his life. According to Daniel T. O'Hara, Yeats' efforts in the genre is "accidental" or "anecdotal" in design and external or two dimensional in the portrait of others and even more damingly in its impressions of the creative life.

Likewise his collection *Essays and Introductions* embodies excerpts and observations on the stalwarts of English Renaissance including Shakespeare and Spencer; exponents of Nationalist Renaissance like A. E (George Russell), Gagorty and Synge; the radical Romantics like Keats, Shelley and Morris; the Victorians such as Tennyson, Browning and the modernists like Auden, Pound and Eliot, to name only a few. Another volume *Explorations* comprises Mrs. Yeats' selection of certain essays written by Yeats including one on the conceptualization and realization of the Abbey Theatre. Yeats' prose work has been exalted by the likes of Harold Bloom for whom Yeats' autobiography represents the poet's greatest achievement in prose (179). *A Vision* is likewise a statement of Yeats' profound philosophical and mystic theory which he formulated on the basis of his wife's automatism. It is a complex work which incorporates mythology, cosmology, historiography and psychology, and endeavours to present quest for unity of Being and the journey of soul after death.

A seminal playwright, Yeats apart from formulating a distinctive theory on dramatics, wrote thirty-three plays, including farces and conventional folk dramas, verse plays based on
Irish myths and experimental plays for dancers. His dramatic career can be divided into three distinct categories: the early period which concluded with the first draft of *The Countess Cathleen* (1892), followed by a sustained dramatic period marked by collaborations, revisions and the success of his nationalist play, *Cathleen ni Hoolihan* (1902) and the final period when his plays became more experimental, symbolic and esoteric. These plays exhibit Yeats’ constant endeavour to experiment with form, content and style of presentation. He not only introduced poetic drama but also inducted a semblance of Japanese Noh plays on to the Irish theatre. Open to collaborations - the most prominent being with Synge, Lady Gregory, designer Gordon Craig and dancers Michio Ito and Ninette De Valois, he continued to write prolifically despite failing health. In fact, his play *The Death of Cuchulain* was his last work which was published, days before his death on 28 January 1939. *Cathleen ni Hoolihan, Deirdre,* and *Purgatory* are some of the better known plays of Yeats. Although as a dramatist, he did not show much promise initially because of the rudimentary style of writing and his own misgivings regarding the aesthetic worth of his early plays, yet these plays remain significant for researchers as they display early influences on Yeats that contoured his poetics in general. His critique on the prevalent dramatic forms and the experimentations he initiated comprise an integral part of his critical credo.

The abundant correspondence which Yeats exchanged with friends and relatives embodies his ideology and philosophy on literature, art and aesthetics. These letters also provide us directly the raw material, out of which his art was composed. Yeats believed what was certainly true in his own case, that a poet writes always of his personal life, yet to express this personal life satisfactorily he must create out of the bundle of accident and incoherence that sits down to breakfast, a secondary artistic personality. In providing the context for his art, and revealing the complex relationships between the man and his masks, Yeats’ letters offer many insights into the workings of his imagination (Kelly, *Letters* xxxvii). Yeats used his correspondence variously - to question, explain and justify his own craft, to meditate over the movements he began or joined, to critique the biographies of his friends that he penned down and even to achieve objectivity in self-criticism. Often regarded as parched and emotionless accounts of the tension between Yeats and his poetics, these letters throw ample light on Yeats as a literary critic. Since the vitality and passion of his creative works and speeches was in deep contrast to the dryness of the letters, which though enlightening were hardly ever exhilarating, Yeats does not enjoy the reputation of being a letter-writer of repute. He lacked the warm affection and emotion of Keats and also the wit and terseness of
Byron. Hence these letters may not be of much interest to a casual reader, but they provide invaluable insights into Yeats’ development of poetical theory. According to F. W. Dupee:

Yeats was a meticulous correspondent, giving in abundance what he could give: ideas, plans, criticism and anecdotes. He had a zest for problems and situations, which his letters communicate to us. They show how firmly he occupied that twilight realm between dreaming and doing which he celebrated in all his poetry-the realm where anything is possible. (Dupee 108)

Insightful analysis and critique of literary works and events embodied in Yeats’ letters and essays confirm his profundity of perceptive thought process, astute opinions, and philosophical musings. Apart from monitoring his own development as a writer, Yeats took keen interest in the works of younger poets and critically analyzed and suggested improvements to them in order to refine their verses. Endowed with instinctive sharpness and keen observation, besides critiquing other writers, he also re-assessed and re-wrote his own poems and prose works such as his introductions, plays, memoirs, essays and autobiographies. Criticism, as he practiced it, was really an overflow of his autobiography (Kiberd 115), for he used it as a device to explore himself. His endeavour was to promote Romantic critical tradition. He also explored the possibilities of Symbolism and believed in the inclusive potential of morals and aesthetics in literature and art. Yeats’ proclamation, “I have had no propaganda but that of good art” (Ex 100), stressed the utilitarian purpose of art and the subservience of aesthetics to it as the principal tenet of his critical perceptions in life. He regarded himself as a critic not only of literature, but also of human life and society in general. His close friend Kathleen Tynan also endorsed this when she posited: “He had an uncanny faculty of standing aside and looking on art, the game of life as a spectator” (L 181).

Born in 1865 in a Protestant Anglo-Irish family, Yeats grew up in an intellectually stimulating environment. His father J. B. Yeats, a distinguished painter and man of letters, took on himself the responsibility of introducing the young “Willie” to the best of literature and art. Shakespeare, Donne, Shelley, Balzac, Blake - all inspired and influenced Yeats to develop his poetic theory. A frequent visitor to his father’s Pre-Raphaelite studio, he acquired his initial taste and aesthetic precepts from his father. A profound thinker and an artist, his father taught Yeats to search for “Unity of Being” rather than merely accept “experience for its own sake or subordinate experience to moral or religious experience” (Ellmann, Man xxviii). His wife Georgie Hyde Lees whom he met in 1911 and married in 1917 was also a
vital influence on Yeats’ artistic development. She shared his interest in mystical and esoteric subjects and introduced him to automatic writing. This laid the foundation for his much acclaimed work *A Vision* in 1925, wherein Yeats attempted to explain and justify his complex philosophy and extensive use of Symbolism.

An indifferent student at school, Yeats did not show much interest in formal education, though he keenly studied art and assimilated Aestheticism which was in vogue at that time. Amongst the numerous influences on the young Yeats, the most profound had been his study of the poetry and paintings of the Pre-Raphaelites, the French Symbolist poets, William Blake’s mysticism, and subjects like theology and occult. Distancing from Protestantism for its association with materialism, Yeats endeavoured to create a new religion with its own sacred code - a re-creation of the original faith of mankind. Instead of repudiating science, the new religion incorporated and accommodated it within itself. Similarly, he devised his own mystical view of life based on Paganism and Oriental religions. Thus inclined, he first joined Theosophical Society under Madam Blavatsky and later became a member of Occult Order of the Golden Dawn. As displayed by his writings, he developed passion for mysticism and occult sciences, and was driven by an unquenched desire for knowledge of the unknown and what lies beyond man’s limited vision. Yeats also gained knowledge of philosophy from diverse sources including philosophers like Plato, Plotinus, and Pythagoras; as also from Hinduism, Buddhism, Hermeneutics, and mysticism of the Middle Ages. He also linked magic with Rosicrucian and Kabbalistic societies. Based on these, he intended to form a highly esoteric personal theory in which reality could be fused with vision. His ambitious aspiration was to work out a scheme which would allow his mind to roam freely into the past or future or to bring the visionary and the illusionary future to illuminate the present.

A pivotal role in formulating and nurturing Yeats’ aesthetic sensibility and his poetics was played by the cities of Dublin and London where he lived alternately. While in Dublin, the spiritual and mystical elements of Irish mythology, folklore and occult intrigued and inspired him. Later, living in London, he got exposed to the best in literature and art. His house became a haven for many writers and artists who often discussed literature, art, religion and politics, thereby giving an impetus to the youthful poet’s artistic proclivity. In an effort to combine both the sensibilities and aesthetics of the two cities, Yeats, the critic, constantly parleyed with the London aesthetes for whom *fûrt* and poetry was increasingly *fîbecoming*
every day more entirely ends in themselves and the Dublin patriots for whom literature must be the expression of conviction the garment of noble emotion and not an end in itself (UP I 248-9).

By his early twenties, Yeats had met many scholars and writers including George Bernard Shaw, Oscar Wilde, William Ernest Henley, and Ernest Rhys with whom he founded the London-based Rhymers Club in 1890. In 1885, Yeats had met two of his lifelong friends and confidants - Katharine Tynan and John O L eary. Soon after, he published his first book Mosada: A Dramatic Poem in 1886 and his Pre-Raphaelite inspired The Wanderings of Oisin and Other Poems in 1889. Oisin may be read as a story of rebirth or reincarnation, reflecting Yeats struggle to link ancient Irish myth with occult doctrines. Notably, Yeats artistic psyche was inspired by the noted Irish revolutionary, O L eary's nationalistic vision and broadminded approach towards politics. The relationship forged by Yeats between literature and politics was reformed by O L eary who reiterated the need of art to be rooted in the native soil, thereby exciting Yeats to discover the Irish literary tradition. Yeats had an uncritical admiration for Walter Pater too. Pater hold over his artistic consciousness is apparent from the fact that Yeats used Pater's Mona Lisa passage, from his acclaimed work The Renaissance, to open The Oxford Book of Modern Verse. Pater also influenced Yeats prose style especially in the early essays wherein Yeats echoed Pater's hatred for political and moral discursiveness in poetry and his low opinion of art geared to the political needs of the moment, inspiring him to deride propaganda and political agenda in literature. Similarly, Yeats drew inspiration from and alluded to Pater's historical relativism, his love for the Greek art and sculpture and the Hellenic spirit in his critical writings. The ideological and philosophical patterns of Oscar Wilde critical prowess also won appreciation from Yeats, though the latter rated Wilde's creative achievements rather low. Approving of Wilde's collection of essays titled Intentions, Yeats had remarked that these essays hide within its immense paradox some of the most subtle literary criticism we are likely to see for many a long day (UP I 204). Another enduring influence on Yeats has been that of Nietzsche who is credited with ushering in a radical transformation in Yeats poetical style from his lovelorn, dreamy, pining stance to realistic and often bitter musings. However, Yeats connection with Nietzsche went much beyond literary influence, for both of them shared a common philosophical temperament and way of understanding the world.
The passionate nationalistic tendencies which Yeats demonstrated throughout his life can be attributed to diverse reasons. Yeats was an Irishman steeped in the mystical and magical beliefs of the peasant culture of Ireland. Born in a seaside village of Sandy Mount, Dublin, he was introduced to the Irish folklore by his mother Susan Pollexfen who belonged to a wealthy family of County Sligo, with firm political loyalties with the Crown of Britain. However, William Butler Yeats' father, John Butler Yeats, was a loyal supporter of the nationalists and home rulers. Yeats inherited from his mother the love and fascination for his native place, and his patriotism from his father. Although he grew up shuttling between Sligo and London, spending most of his time away from Ireland, his imagination and creativity continued to be stimulated by it. Yeats grew sharply conscious of the conflicts that alienated colonial Ireland from imperial Britain and that, within Ireland, divided Protestant descendants of British settlers from their usually less powerful and poorer Catholic neighbours (Holdeman 2). Despite the fact that Yeats belonged to the dominant Protestant Anglo-Irish minority which had been controlling the economic, political and cultural life of Ireland since the end of the 17th century, he had his sympathies firmly placed with the nationalists.

Mesmerized by the legends, folklores and the supernatural world of fairies, ghosts, haunted lakes, holy mountains and the spiritual powers of nature which were integral to the lives of the people of west Ireland, Yeats adopted them as the subject matter for many of his works. High sense of nationalism and a desire to revive the ancient oral tradition of Gaelic folklore and songs led him to extensively research, and write such collaborations as *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* (1888), *Irish Fairy Tales* (1892), and *A Book of Irish Verse* (1895). In 1889, he met the fiery radical firebrand nationalist Maud Gonne who became his muse and source of unrequited love. In 1891, Yeats founded the Irish Literary Society in London and inspired by Maud Gonne's restless spirit, he wrote a play *The Countess Cathleen*. Enthused by her patriotic fervour, he immersed himself in the nationalist politics, both out of conviction for the national cause, and a desire to be near her.

Further convinced that drama could be used effectively to promote and publicize Ireland's cause and propagate national unity, Yeats along with Edward Martyn, an Irish playwright, novelist and patron of arts, and John Synge, a poet, prose writer, playwright and a collector of folklores, set up a new theatre in Dublin. In 1896, he met Lady Gregory, an Irish aristocrat, writer and promoter of Irish literature. Their alliance led to the establishment of The Irish Literary Theatre in Dublin which, in 1904, was rechristened The Abbey Theatre or
The National Theatre of Ireland. *The Countess Cathleen* (1891), *On Bailey’s Strand* (1892), *The Land of Heart’s Desire* (1894), *Cathleen ni Hoolihan* (1902), and *The King’s Threshold* (1904) are some of Yeats’ most successful dramatic works to be performed here. Valuing his long lasting association with Synge, Lady Gregory and their role in Irish Renaissance, he acknowledged their contribution in his address to the Swedish Royal Academy, while receiving the Noble Prize for Literature.

To promote Irish cultural nationalism and to counter Anglicization of the Irish culture, Yeats, along with Charles Steward Parnell, an Irish protestant reformer, propagated Irish literary revival. Yeats was also associated with the Fenian Secret Society which aimed to popularize Irish freedom struggle among the exiles and the immigrants. Like Parnell, Yeats was also convinced that literature and politics were inseparable. The Irish writers, he believed, could serve the cause of autonomy and freedom for Ireland, and so in association with John Millington Synge, he endeavoured to create a typically Irish style of literature. He used vivid images from Irish history and its landscape in his nationalist writings. He fervently supported Ó’Leary who took up the cause of Gaelic writers at a time when the native literature was in danger of being lost as a result of England’s attempts to “anglicize” Ireland by banning the Gaelic language. His increasing disappointment with developments in Ireland produced some of the finest poems of English Literature. Consequently, his poems are not only the outpour of a poet’s sentiments; they are a treatise on the social, political and literary scenario of his times. Thus if *No Second Troy* illustrates the political agitation, *September 1913* laments the passing away of Romantic nationalism and mourns the death of Ó’Leary:

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Romantic Ireland dead and gone
It with O’Leary in the grave. (SP 55)
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Likewise *Easter 1916* embarks on an extended reflection on the significance and futility of the sacrifices made for Ireland during the Rising. The poem also anticipates, by almost half a century, the historical re-visioning of the need of the uprising, which emerged in the 1960s. Thus many of his poems such as *A Prayer for my Daughter*, *The Tower*, *Meditations in Times of Civil War*, *Among School Children*, and *Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931* were inspired by Ireland, and so were many of his plays. The same motivation led him to establish The Abbey Theatre.
Yeats' critical cerebrations cogently expressed his belief in the dictum “Art is revelation, not criticism.” He professed that literature should always be personal, depicting one man’s experience and vision of the world. However, to popularize art, men must be ready to welcome the visions of others. Further, he reckoned poetry to be not criticism of life as Arnold proposed, but reproach to life and by extension, he deemed a poet’s work a revelation and the work of the reader criticism. Following this principle, Yeats formulated his personal system of aesthetics; made insightful comments about the artist’s function in society; and discovered an inherent relationship between life and finer arts. His erudition, his irrefutably varied interests and his multi-dimensional approach to literature were hardly a deterrent to his own endeavour to shape the entire canon of his work into a unified body of art. Having set himself an ambitious task of uniting his works, he undertook revision, rearrangement and deletion of poems, essays, and even letters. Instead of compiling his works chronologically in various editions to achieve organic unity, he tried to fit them into sections - political, autobiographical, historical or mystic - all amalgamated and unified through a string of recurrent images, metaphors and symbols, themes and plots. A self-critic, Yeats interspersed his poems and plays with revelatory essays and observations in letters to clarify his design and viewpoint. In Unterecker's opinion, Yeats tried to use his prose to construct framework to integrate his life and work, to construct a kind of vast Gestalt in which his experiences, his prose statements and his art would unite in one complex but vivid thing (Unterecker 5). Even in the last year of his life, he was talking about completion. Although his death prevented him from achieving it, he had intended to write one more essay to explain the indivisible pattern of his life and to present his private philosophy as opposed to the public, historical and metaphysical one embodied in A Vision. In a letter to Lady Elizabeth Pelham, he wrote: “I will begin to write my most fundamental thoughts and arrangements of thoughts which I am convinced will complete my studies and further adds “when I try to put all into a phrase I say, Man can embody truth but he cannot know it” I must embody it in the completion of my life, the abstract is not life and everywhere draws out its contradiction.” (qtd. in Ross 29).

However, the thematic and imagistic links between his works seemed too varied and vague to lend them any coherent unity. Yeats' arbitrary and at times, illogical structuring of his works into sections lacked synthesis or any rational fusion. In fact, his erudition, his oscillating interests and the inconsistent theories and ideologies he propounded have continued to baffle his readers and critics alike. Perhaps this was the reason that he could not
evolve any systematic philosophy or a methodical structure of beliefs. His creative faculty, dominated by complexity of attitude, and execution and treatment of subjects, leaves them open to varied interpretations. Consequently, his achievements as a literary writer have been a subject of speculation and curiosity ever since he began writing.

Nevertheless, Yeats’s romance with Ireland and everything Irish was integral to his literary and critical writings. His contribution in these fields is largely seen as a canon-formation for the Irish freedom struggle. The aim of his literary criticism was also to arouse Irish intelligentsia which could lead to the rise in this country of a new thought, a new opinion, which we had long needed (UP I 350). His prose generated a national public debate on the nature of the Irish culture, the essence of Ireland, and explored the pragmatics of relational equation between Ireland and England, the Catholics and the Protestants, politics and culture, religion and politics, and also the Irish language and the English language. His literary criticism on Irish cause, which is primarily belligerent and aggressive in manner, is embodied in numerous journals such as The Nation, The Statesman, The Irish Review and The United Irishman, to name only a few. Out of the copious critical pieces that he wrote on Irish National Literature for The Bookman, four stand out from the rest. These include Callahan to Carleton, Contemporary Prose Writers, Contemporary Irish Poets and A List of the Best Irish Books. The latter was an attempt to identify a school of men of letters, unified by a common purpose, and a small but increasing public who love literature for their own sake (UP I 373). To justify his list, Yeats posits: in a literature like the Irish which is not new, but without recognized criticism, any list, no matter how personal, if it be not wholly foolish, is a good deed in a disordered world (UP I 382). Those who were regarded eminent writers by Yeats include Maria Edgeworth, William Carleton, Douglas Hyde, A. E., Lady Wilde, and Standish O’Leary - well known literary figures even in present times. Some poets like Sir Samuel Ferguson, James Clarence Mangan, and William Allingham found fame because of Yeats. Thus undoubtedly, Yeats’s contribution to Irish and English literature is matchless not only in its copiousness but also in its range and diversity.

II

Nevertheless, it is widely acknowledged that Yeats excites both passionate defence and hostile indifference amongst the critics. Since 1886, there has not been a year when Yeats was not the subject of critical reviews or articles. Although never clubbed with the likes of
T.S. Eliot or James Joyce, his position in the annals of the literary history is secure. Hence he continues to be and always will be a subject of interest and intensive study and debate for generations to come. The early reviews about Yeats have been rather discouraging. W. P. Ryan, the first historian of the Irish Literary Revival, was sceptical about Yeats' worth as a writer. In the 1919 review of *The Wild Swan at Coole*, John Middleton Murray disparagingly declared it as his *swan song* eloquent of the final defeat and deemed its author as *worn out not with dreams but with the vain effort to master them* (40-41). Yeats was often ridiculed for his literary peculiarities and was laughed at for his critical eccentricities. In his famous elegy *In Memory of W. B. Yeats* (1939), Auden exhibits his ambivalence towards Yeats. While admiring the latter's poignancy, he shows contempt for Yeats' delusions. Thus while allowing Yeats into the pantheon on account of his poetic gifts as a litterateur, Auden holds him guilty of misunderstanding and misrepresenting the modern age. Yvor Winters also lashed against Yeats for irrationalism in his verse, especially his obscure symbolism - which was either too clichéd or too private to be comprehensible. He believed Yeats' poems to be inflated, and marred with confusion of thought and ineptitude of style. In his essay *Passion and Cunning*, Conor Cruise O'Brien condemns Yeats for his authoritarian and fascist leanings. Thus Yeats seems to have invited the wrath of his critics for his constantly shifting ideology and varying styles and perhaps of his inability to subscribe to a particular school of thought or period.

A critic who had an opinion on almost everything and everyone, Yeats has often been tagged a *literary authoritarian*, guilty of passing inapt judgments on his contemporaries such as Owen and Isaac Rosenberg and for ignoring Wordsworth, Arnold and Coleridge altogether. His theory of art, his critical perceptions, and his contribution as a literary critic have come under the scanner for its maze of ambivalent ideas and notions, failings and contradictions which abound his literary output. Branding him quaint, artificial and pretentious, his detractors express their indignation with his *fascism* and regard him a *self-indignant trifler* and a decadent without a heart or a mind. His critics also indict him for being a fastidious writer, guilty of generalizations, and for placing inappropriate trust in sympathetic intuitions. D. S. Savage, in a vitriolic attack on Yeats, asserts: *Essentially a non-dynamic mind, he [Yeats] was saved from dissipation or vulgarization of his craft by the narrowness of his interest and the strictness of his devotion to his craft. Inwardly, he lacked the visionary intensity of the creative spirit, and his art developed peripherally, unaccompanied by any interesting inward personal development* (Savage 197). John
Middleton Murray also unleashed an acerbic attack on Yeats in his review of "The Wild Swans at Coole" with his observation:

His sojourn in the world of the imagination, far from enriching his vision, has made it infinitely tenuous. Whether Mr. Yeats by some grim fatality mistook his Phantasmagoria for the product of the creative imagination, or whether he made an effort to discipline them to his poetic purpose and failed we cannot certainly say. Of this, we are certain that somehow, somewhere, there has been disaster. (Murray 44-5)

Yvor Winters sums up the case against Yeats as a profound, coherent writer with his observation that at crucial moment Yeats suffers from the fundamental post-Romantic defect of the abandonment of logic that Yeats achieved a fictitious coherence is guilty of intellectual confusion and is an unregenerate Romantic (qtd. in Jaffares, Yeats 315-16).

Similarly, Yeats' characteristic bias against the inclusion of the works of the War Poets in The Modern Book of Modern Verse on the pretext that passive suffering is not a theme for poetry (OBMV xv) attracted censure from all quarters not only for his highhandedness in being prejudiced against certain writers, but also for the ideological contradictions inherent in his own philosophy. Contrary to what he professed, he eulogized Major Robert Gregory and the revolutionaries of the Irish freedom struggle for their valour and conviction in some of his heroic elegies (OBMV xxxiv). In this context, Parkinson avers: In spite of his extensive comments on the art of poetry, Yeats has always seemed special and odd in his criticism, his pleas for Walter Pater and Dorothy Wellesley falling on suspicious ears, and his stress on magic lacking the kind of cultural acceptability that distinguishes the criticism of T. S. Eliot and his followers (Parkinson, Self-Critic 233).

Concomitantly, Yeats has an army of defenders as well who vouch for his creative ability, imaginative instinct and versatility in writing. The early critical reviews on Yeats from 1887 to 1892 concentrate primarily on him as a new poet on the block. Edward Thomas defends Yeats in no uncertain terms. In an article in The Daily Chronicle, he vouched that the volume of work done by Yeats by then was enough to establish him as a young distinguished poet. Yeats' worth can be determined through numerous articles on him in journals such as The Irish Monthly, The Freeman's Journal, The Academy, and The Saturday Reviews. By the turn of the century, Yeats had become a known figure in the literary circles. In fact, The
Southern Review (1941-42) had dedicated a special issue to Yeats, recognizing his contribution to English Literature with inputs from the likes of T. S. Eliot, L. C. knight, F. O. Mathiessen, John Crowe Ransom, Kenneth Bruke, Allen Tate, Austen Warren and Randell Jarrell. Describing Yeats’s craft as a “lovely, dense, unchartered wilderness,” Parkinson asserted that “Yeats has become a classic author, in the quantitative sense that more has been written about him than he wrote himself” (Parkinson, Review 752). Yeats won admiration from T. S. Eliot as well. The rather disparagingly negative initial impression which Eliot had formed about Yeats’s critical acuity underwent a change with time. Subsequently, he asserted that Yeats held firmly “the right view between Art for Art’s sake and Art for social purpose,” and showed that an artist, by serving his art with entire integrity is, at the same time, rendering the greatest service he can to his own nation and to the whole of the world (Poets 262). In the first annual Yeats Lecture delivered at Abbey Theatre in 1940, T. S. Eliot had declared:

There are some poets whose poetry can be considered more or less in isolation for experience and delight. There are others whose poetry though giving equally, experience and delight, has a larger historical importance. Yeats was one of the latter. He was one of those few whose history is the history of their own time, who are a part of the consciousness of an age which cannot be understood without them. This is a very high position assigned to him; but I believe it is one which is secure. (262)

Incontestably, it is his reputation as a poet and a dramatist that has overshadowed Yeats’s creative achievements as a critic. Innumerable critical accounts and books have been written on his poetic style, his genius as a symbolic poet and on his enigmatic personality in general but there has been inadequate inquiry into his critical writings. His poetic beliefs, his evaluations of the works of his contemporaries and evocative general outlook on literature, its nuances, and its varied forms as encapsulated in his prose works have not been comprehensibly explored. Undoubtedly, equipped as he was, with profound knowledge and interest in mythology, mysticism, theology, occult, art and sculpture, Yeats confounds his readers and critics with the vastness of his range and knowledge. Consequently, his enigmatic theory of literary criticism is rather philosophic and speculative and even sentimental at times and it has remained rather undervalued as compared to his poetic feats.

An extensive search in libraries and on the internet including Google books have led to very few relevant books and articles pertaining to Yeats as a critic per se. Most critical and
analytical studies on Yeats evaluate and explore him as a poet. Thus The Golden Nightingale: Essays on Some Principles of Poetry in the Lyrics of William Butler Yeats (1949) by Donald A. Stauffer is a collection of essays on the principles of poetry in the lyrics of Yeats. It elucidates his mysticism, his use of symbols and other poetic techniques, and addresses some of the vital obscurities of Yeats' poetic art. However, this book like many others focuses only on one aspect of Yeats' critical achievements, concentrating only on his lyrical talent while ignoring his dramatic, prosodic or critical flair. George Brandon Saul's Prolegomena to the Study of Yeats' Poems (1957) meticulously catalogues a list of all articles and books published on Yeats till then but critically analyses his poetry only. In W.B Yeats, Man and Poet (1962), A. Norman Jeffares presents varied interrelationships - between Yeats' life and his poems; between his works written at different times and his perception about life and poetry. Similarly The Lonely Tower: Studies in the Poetry of W. B. Yeats (1965) by T. R. Henn is also a seminal study on Yeats' meditations on poetry. The Gaiety of Language: An Essay on the Radical Poetics of W. B. Yeats and Wallace Stevens (1968) by Frank Lentricchia examines the poetics of W. B. Yeats and Wallace Stevens and tries to establish them as anti-Romantics. He distorts their critical views to gratify his own theory whereas Denis Donoghue in his book William Butler Yeats (1971) studies in context Yeats' feelings and sensibilities from which his poems and plays emerge. Thomas Whitaker's Swan and Shadow: Yeats' Dialogue with History (1964), and Donald Torchiana's W. B. Yeats and Georgian Ireland (1966) are some of the outstanding critical commentaries on Yeats' aesthetics.

In fact, these critics, through systematic critical study of Yeats' craft, provide a substantial base to John Unterecker's A Reader's Guide to William Butler Yeats (1980) which explores his aestheticism further. The book critically elucidates the principal themes of Yeats' poems and analyses poem by poem Yeats' verse, thereby providing vital information on the background, the occasion, the imagery and the symbolism of each poem. Other significant works on Yeats' poetry include Daniel Harris' Yeats: Coole Park and Ballylee; and George Bornstein's two outstanding contributions: Yeats and Shelley, and Transformations of Romanticism in Yeats, Eliot and Stevens. In 1980s, books such as Yeats and Nietzsche: An Exploration of Major Nietzschean Echoes in the Writings of W. B. Yeats (1982) by Otto Bohlmann; C. K. Stead's Yeats and Pound - Modern and Modernist (1986), and Elizabeth Bergmann Loizeaux's Yeats and the Visual Arts (1986) elucidate Yeats' relationship with visual arts. Similarly, M. L. Rosenthal in his book Running to Paradise (1994) provides evaluative poetic criticism rather than a bibliographic or biographical study.
Concurring on the distinctive scale and power of Yeats' poetic talent, critics are divided on categorizing him as either a Romantic English poet or a Modernist poet.

Although the essential concern of the critics and reviewers seems primarily for Yeats' poetic art, there has been substantial research on his dramaturgy as well. Regarded as the first dramatist of the 20th century, Yeats brought poetry closer to drama and discovered new conventions and techniques for it. Thomas Parkinson’s *W. B. Yeats: Self-Critic* concentrates primarily on his dramatic art while Moody E. Prior analyses the language of Yeats' dramas in the book *The Language of Tragedy* (1948). The book *Masks of Love and Death* (1971) by John Rees Moore makes a literary study of plays as closet drama and not as plays meant for the stage. Moore does not explore the theatrical possibilities of the plays, although many of them were successfully performed in various theatres around the world. In contrast, Liam Miller’s *The Noble Plays of W. B. Yeats* (1977) catalogues quite meticulously the records of productions of his plays. Miller also enumerates various stage devices altered, adopted or invented by Yeats to suit his design. Similarly, James Flannery’s *W. B. Yeats and the Idea of a Theatre* (1989), true to its title, explores Yeats' vision about theatre in general and a national heroic theatre in particular, thereby lending a historical perspective to Yeats' dramaturgy.

Significant in this regard is also the three volumes of *History of Abbey Theatre* by Robert Hogan and James Kilroy. These three volumes titled *The Irish Literary Theatre, 1899-1901; Laying the Foundations, 1902-1904* and *The Abbey Theatre: the Years of Synge, 1905-1909* respectively provide an insightful chronological account of the history of Irish drama and Yeats’ contribution to the cause and the evolution of this craft in adequate details. David R. Clark’s *The Drama of Passionate Perception* W. B. Yeats and The Theatre of Desolate Reality*” (1965); Peter Ure’s *The Hero on the World Tree: Yeats’ Plays, English* (1965); Ruby Cohn’s *The Plays of Yeats through Beckett Coloured Glasses, Threshold*, (19650 and Hiro Ishibashi’s *Yeats and the Noh, Types of Japanese Beauty and Their Reflection in Yeats’ plays*, (1966) are some of the other significant studies on Yeats as a dramatist. The 1980s also saw a spurt in critical works on Yeats. One of the most outstanding studies has been Daniel. T. O'Hara’s *Tragic Knowledge: Yeats’ Autobiography and Hermeneutics* (1981). Similarly, Edward Engelberg’s *The Vast Design* traces the patterns in Yeats’ aesthetics. George Mills Harper’s new critical edition of *A Vision* titled *Yeats and Occult* (1975) makes a profound study of Yeats’ passion for occult, while Robert Langbaum's *The
Mysteries of Identity (1977) deftly explores Yeats' philosophy of gyres and presents a fresh reading of A Vision.

The range and complexity of Yeats' critical and literary sensibility can also be judged from the fact that even his biographers have not succeeded in decoding the mystery of the gamut of his entire literary and social enterprises. Some of the most comprehensive and exhaustive biographical studies on Yeats include Donald Stauffer's The Golden Nightingale (1949), Richard Ellmann's The Man and The Masks (1949), and The Identity of Yeats (1964); Joseph Hone's official biography W. B. Yeats (1962); Norman Jeffares' W.B Yeats, Man and The Poet (1962), Peter Ure's Yeats, The Playwright (1963), Yeats (1965), and Yeats and Anglo–Irish Literature (1974). K. P. S Jachum's W. B. Yeats: A classified Bibliography of Criticism (1978) comprises commentary on Yeats from the earliest notes and reviews through 1971. This collection includes nearly 350 new additions to Wade and Alspach's primary bibliography, and 7500 items of commentary. Similarly, E. H. Mikhail's two volumes of W. B. Yeats: Interviews and Recollections present in anecdotal form, many of the remnants of Yeats' past. William Murphy's Prodigal Father: The Life of John Butler Yeats (1839–1922) while providing an insightful study into the life of John Yeats, meticulously highlights how for W. B. Yeats, his father remained a formidable influence, guiding him perpetually in his creative endeavour. Another indispensable source of information on research carried out on Yeats is Finneran's Anglo-Irish Literature: A Review of Research. It presents an all-inclusive, analytical and descriptive review of studies from the initial reception of Yeats' works until 1974. In the same way, W. B. Yeats: Critical Assessment, edited by David Pierce provides a research source by meticulously compiling reviews and articles on Yeats in four volumes through time and movements till 2000, but this collection, too, like most others, does not contain much literature on Yeats as a critic.

Besides these, there have been innumerable studies on the various aspects of Yeats' life and personality. If R. F. Foster presents us with Yeats- the public man, the acerbic critic of imperialism, and an informal historian; Keith Alldritt offers us Yeats who fashioned art out of experience. Richard Ellmann in his book Yeats: The Man and the Masks subtly provides an insight into Yeats' craft as a writer and his personality based primarily on the former's comprehensive analysis of published and unpublished manuscripts acquired from Mrs. Yeats. Likewise Harold Bloom discusses in a chronological order different approaches to Yeats, the influences on him and his works including A Vision in his book entitled Yeats (1972).
Another book by the same title written by Frank Tuohy is an unpretentious and illustrated work in clear, simple language on Yeats' creative instincts and achievements. All these books offer considerable biographical information about Yeats, yet they are inadequate in providing much insight into his critical beliefs.

Broadly speaking, spanning over more than a century and a quarter now, the critical evaluation of Yeats has been characterized by certain trends. Critics differ and debate on Yeats' immense talent, grandiose intentions and exorbitant ambition as a writer. If J. M. Hone censures Yeats for caring only for the making of beautiful things, T. S. Eliot commends him as one of those few whose history is the history of their own time, who are a part of the consciousness of an age which cannot be understood without them (Eliot, Poet 262). In Harold Bloom's opinion: Though Yeats tried to be a spiritual alchemist, he became a visionary poet, though an inconstant one (Bloom vii). W. P. Ryan maintains there is something evasive in him, something inarticulate also, which baffles that dull thing, classification (Ryan 12). Fiona Macleod highlights Yeats' defects thus: His mysticism is sometimes mere vagueness; his symbolism sometimes arbitrary imagery; and there is in his imaginative prose in particular a tendency to veil the contours of the motive thought in a moonshine mist or in dyes of a romantic beauty too august, too remote, for the essential observation (Pierce II 29). Thus Yeats' detractors may have censured him for certain features or traits in his literary output, yet it is an established fact that they could not ignore or dismiss him as insignificant or a mediocre writer.

Conversely, though many critics have written capaciously on Yeats, his enigmatic and voluminous contribution to English literature leaves many aspects undiscovered and unexplored. His critical credo is one of the grossly neglected aspects of his literary oeuvre. There has been rather inadequate inquiry into the essential essence of his critical credo and his avowed mission to unite his works into an organic whole. Although his prose has often been appreciated for its stylistic excellence, yet there have been few insightful studies of note which are based entirely on his prose work. Hence only a few books are available which elucidate and explore Yeats' critical ideas or discuss his critical prose in some detail. Most of them deal with one or more particular aspects of his critical faculty and there is not much comprehensive literature available on his critical thinking or his contribution as a literary critic. Though W. Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks examine Yeats' symbolism in their Literary Criticism: A Short History (1970), yet they do not explore Yeats' other critical perceptions in
any depth. Two essays, both titled “Yeats as a Critic” written by A. N. Jeffares published in the journal *English* (1963-64) and another by Peter Faulkner published in *Criticism* (1962) are informative but only sketchy chronological accounts of Yeats’ body of critical thought and philosophical understanding of literature as an art form. Vinod Sena in his seminal study *W. B. Yeats: The Poet as Critic* deals with Yeats as a critic, yet he restricts his study only to the poet Yeats and does not delve into other aspects of his critical acuity. While Dr. B. N. Prasad in his book *The Literary Criticism of W. B. Yeats* deals more with his biography, the influences on his ideology, and his ideas on symbolism, theosophy, magic rather than with his dramatic and poetic concepts.

Like most other aspects of his literary and critical oeuvre, Yeats’ avowed allegiance to the Irish national cause was also mired in controversy. His detractors questioned his sincerity towards Gaelic traditions in the wake of his ignorance of the Irish language. He was criticized for propagating Irish literature without knowing the Gaelic language himself and for his dependence on the translations made by others. Yeats also drew flak because political debate in Ireland had, by then, become more belligerent with the emergence of Polemists like Arthur Griffith and especially D. P. Moran who was sharply critical of Yeats and the Irish literary movement he personified. Moran believed that proper Irish Literature could only be written in the Gaelic language. Ironically, Yeats wrote the most unequivocally nationalist piece of writing, *Cathleen ni Hoolihan*, which established him more firmly as an Irish writer of repute, in English. Similarly, Jonathan Allison in his article “The Attack on Yeats” critiques the observations made by Daniel Corkery, Patrick Kavanagh and Conor Cruise O’Brien who had challenged Yeats’ canonical position in Irish, Anglo-Irish and English Literature. In 1965, Conor Cruise O’Brien had censured Yeats’ views of Irishness as Anglo-Irish, aristocratic and fascist and later Seamus Deane and W. J. McCormack followed the same course. However, these critics were vehemently opposed by sympathetic critics of Yeats such as T. R. Henn and Donald Torchiana who were compassionate towards Yeats’ passion for Ireland and its national character.

Thus the response of the critics on Yeats’ stance towards the Irish nationalistic cause, as propounded in his critical writings and poetry, is marked with ambivalence and ambiguity. No wonder, for some he is a liberal humanist and individualist, for others he remains a devoted Irish nationalist and for still others, his sincerity and veracity to the cause itself is questionable. The post-modern and post-colonial writers also emphasize the complex,
incongruous, and pluralistic nature of Yeats' version of Irishness. Again, the varied interpretations of Yeats' commitment to the Irish national cause was an outcome of Yeats' own unsure and oft conflicting and contradictory musings for the cause. Yet despite this incongruity, Yeats' association and commitment to Ireland remained constant and so did his unflinching belief in the truth embodied in the Irish myths, legends and folklores. In his poetic obituary, "Under Ben Bulben," he asserts that "ancient Ireland knew it all." Cognizant of the need for diplomacy in politics, Yeats manipulated his standpoint to suit his purpose. His explanation of the vision of national theatre was directed to please Annie Hornimann who had agreed to extend her patronage to the theatre only if it was not used for political propaganda. Yeats says: "Our plays must be literature or written in the spirit of literature." (Ex 164). He further adds: "Art delights in the exception, for its delight in the soul expressing itself according to its own laws and arranging the world about in its own pattern." (168).

Integral to Yeats' critical matrix is his conviction that the Irish need to cultivate their culture and language. He felt that introduction of apt pedagogical techniques in schools could ensure the training of the Irish mind towards both nationalism and excellence in literature. Giving prominence to the students and the need to impart holistic education in one of his Senate Speeches, he says "I suggest that whether we teach Irish History, Anglo Irish literature or Gaelic, we should always see that the child is the object and not any of our purposes." (SS 112). Posing his faith in the capability of schools in preserving the speech of the people, he records:

I recommend to the intermediate Board a better plan than any they know for teaching children to write good English. Let every child in Ireland be set to turn a leading article or piece of what is called Excellent English, written perhaps by some distinguished member of the Board into the idiom of his own countryside. He will find at once the difference between dead and living words. (Ex 95)

In fact, he has used the teaching metaphor in his criticism quite often. For instance, he thought that the Lane Museum would be "a nursing place for students." (UP I 418). Similarly his vision of an educated emancipated Ireland appeared in one of his Senate speeches where he reiterated the need to build schools and provide the kids reading material to arouse their interest in literature. He says:
Feed the immature imagination upon that old folk life, and the mature intellect upon Berkeley and the great modern idealist philosophy created by his influence, upon Burke and Ireland is reborn, potent; armed and wise. (SS 172)

III

This thesis titled W. B. Yeats as a Critic: A Study of His Poetic Beliefs is a humble attempt to comprehensively analyse Yeats' critical cerebration and poetics. It aims to probe into brilliant yet inconsistent critical intellecions of Yeats in an endeavour to delve into hitherto unexplored and unchartered aspect of his critical accomplishments. Integral to any analytical study of literature, Poetics or poetic beliefs can be defined as a productive construal of the notion of aesthetics and is the objective, scientific and systematic study of Literature. The Oxford Dictionary of Critical Theory defines Poetics as the study of the formal construction of literary works of all genres, not just poetry. It is underpinned by the assumption that it is possible to delineate what it is that separates a poetic (literary) use of language from a non-poetic (ordinary) use of language (Buchanan 369).

Thus while Aristotle had used the word poetics in a limited sense to inquire into the structure of a good poem, in the modern context, within the literary studies, it has broadened its horizons to include the poetics of all genres - the novel, the drama, the short story or feminist biography, to name only a few. In other words, the product of an individual's philosophy, deliberations and reflections on the composition, process of writing and the act of writing constitutes poetics. However, it is distinct from praxis or theory for while the latter theorizes or conjectures on the act of making literature, poetics offers the generative schema and proposes how literature could be or should be made. Consequently, it cannot work independent of the writer's creative works.

The study of poetics has evolved over time and its history can be traced back to Aristotle, through Horace, Sydney, Dryden and Pope and has since then included critical writings such as Wordsworth's Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, Coleridge's Biographia Literaria, Shelley's A Defence of Poetry, Henry James's The Art of Fiction and his prefaces, as also D. H. Lawrence's precept of the modern novel and defence of free verse. In the 20th century, the Modernist and post-Modernist movements like Dadaism, Situationalism and Feminist poetics show a definite proliferation of this discourse. Further, the Structuralist and
Semantic studies regard a literary work as a piece of discourse (text) imbued with its characteristic features or qualities which can be observed, and disputes arising out of its analysis can be settled with reference to its text only. Hence the text is indispensable to the study of poetics. Concurrently, Yeats' literary writings display an amalgamation of all these traditional and the modern elements of poetics into his distinctive poetic beliefs.

Yeats had begun his journey into the world of critical writings as a freelance reviewer-critic and editor, quite early in life. In the initial years, he critiqued his Irish predecessors, appraised the English Romantics and proposed his own concept of Romantic tradition. An assertive and manipulative participant in the clubs and societies he founded or joined, Yeats took to reviewing and lecturing on varied literary topics in these gatherings, thereby honing his critical faculty. Although a forceful proponent and theorist of the Irish Literary Revival, he had no set principles underlying his early prose, for he wrote on an array of, often disconnected, issues and in a rather virulently polemical vein. Even the political opinions and inferences reflected in his writings have been inconsistent, and hence a subject of lively academic discussions. Adopting the critical method of an essayist, Yeats' critical observations were marked with incisive observations on art, literature and poetics in his distinctively colloquial style; often interspersed with gossip, anecdotes, reminiscences and his futuristic creative plans. His critical style varied between calm and placid to argumentative or polemical at times, although he never adhered to the impressionistic critical technique. Defence and defiance being the hallmark of his critical writings, the varied shades of Yeats' critical temperament are manifested through his prose writings. He appeared at times cranky, contentious, and even biased, or sometimes overtly obsequious when he desired so, but never rarefied or solipsistic. The exposition of his poetic beliefs was generally elaborate, even digressive at times, but seldom ever in the genre of scholastic, formal academic lectures.

However Yeats' bounteous and voluminous writings on diverse issues make it a daunting task to analyse his poetic beliefs and to find an organic coherence in his critical writings. It is the problem of plenteous which besieged Yeats' critical craft. An articulate and erudite writer, Yeats had plenty to say on an array of wide-ranging topics. His childlike curiosity to know and his insatiable desire to acquire knowledge of disparate issues provided him with a constant supply of matter to write and critique. His dilemma was that of giving coherence, order and proportion to his insightful observations and ideas which often meandered into disconnected subject matters. Strangely, despite his capacious contribution
as a critic, Yeats seemed to undermine his capabilities as a critic and posed as if criticism was not a priority for him. In fact, from his comments it is apparent that it was a second-rung genre for him. In a letter written in 1897, he acknowledged with apology, a piece he wrote on Robert Bridges with the following remark:

You must not judge it as you would judge an essay to be permanent. It is merely journalism, like all my criticism so far and done more quickly than I would like. One has to give something of one’s self to the devil that one may live. I have given my criticism. (L 286)

Even 35 years later, he was still contrite and rueful despite writing illustrative and insightful critiques. To Horace Reynolds, he wrote:

I was a propagandist and hated being one. I saw clearly the unrealities and half-truths, propaganda had involved me in, and the way out. All one’s life, one struggles towards reality, finding but new veils. One knows everything in one’s mind. It is words, the children of the occasion that betray. (UP I 62)

John Frayne, the editor of Uncollected Prose summarizes this generic distinction: His struggles as a propagandist were in prose, and he wished his poetry to be unsullied by mere political opinion (UP I 62). Nevertheless, Yeats, a self-critic, did not seem to be able to reconcile with his inadequacy in this regard, and never thought highly of his own critical prowess and acuity.

IV

The course of W. B. Yeats’ eventful life coincided with momentous political upheavals such as the Irish freedom struggle, the fall of feudalism in Ireland, the beginning of the end of British empire, the renewed struggle for supremacy and power in Europe, the collapse of Victorian cultural optimism and moralizing sensibilities, the birth of modernity at the turn of the century, and the fall out of World War I. Literary speaking, Yeats, having been born in 1865, belonged to the Victorian era; however, ideologically he did not have much in common with its tenets as practised at the turn of the century. He clearly specified his stance towards the Victorians in the introduction to The Oxford Book of Modern Verse where he posited thus:
The revolt against Victorianism meant to the young poet a revolt against irrelevant descriptions of nature, the scientific and moral discursiveness of *In Memoriam*...the political eloquence of Swinburne, the psychological curiosity of Browning, and the poetic diction of everybody. (*OBMV* ix)

Yeats rejected the growing scientific temper of the Victorian age on the ground that any art based on the advancement of science could not possibly create beauty. This dislike of scientific rationalism was an outcome of his religious dilemma and scepticism which had inspired him to make his Ŧrown religion, almost an infallible church of poetic tradition, of a fardel of stones, and of personages, and of emotionsÉ ô (Au115). Although born into a protestant family, his own unorthodox beliefs prevented him from following any religious ideology. Besides, Yeats had no taste for the Victorian over-emphasis on the ethical and moral improvement of the self, propriety and earnestness. In fact, he had derided the Arnoldian notion of Poetry as a Ŧcriticism of lifeô with his assertion: ŦGreat poetry does not teach us anythingô (*UPI* 84). Such didacticism, he believed, deprived the works of the essential essence and distorted the true intend of art. Consequently, in his critical writings, he seldom discussed the Victorians. Yeats also ostracized the Victorian focus on externalities such as nature, science, morality and politics rather than the internal vision of the poet and also found fault with their rhetorical and argumentative poetic diction. Richard Fallis sums up the case against the Victorians for Yeats:

By attempting to speak to their age and class, most of the Victorian poets had simply compounded the imaginative crisis in which they found themselves, the demands of their audience coupled with their own fears of the implications of visionary Romanticism, had led many of the Victorians to the creation of a Ŧpopular poetry,ô disassociated, artificial and dishonest in its perceptions and expressions. (Fallis 92)

However, despite his avowed decry against Victorianism and hatred for the Ŧsterilites of Victorian scientific rationalismô (Watson 36), it incontestably shaped his poetic sensibility and philosophical acuity. Yeats belonged to the literary epoch dominated by the Victorian Stalwarts like John Ruskin, Walter Horatio Pater, Daniel Gabriel Rossetti and William Morris. These writers were also referred to as the ŦLast Romanticsô by Graham Hugh who shared Yeatsô reservations regarding the prevalent trends in the contemporary literature. Yeats had certain semblance with the Victorian poetic strategies. For instance, his concepts of ôMaskô and ôPersonaô and Victorian ôDramatic Monologueô appear to be somewhat similar
tools which ensured the distance of the poem from the poet. Similarly Yeats’ notion of images and symbols as mediums of sensual perceptions and their identification with the qualities of the objects they represent has Victorian overtures. His belief in the transparency of language as a medium of sensation and in the structures of myth and history as forms of narratives which extol personalities also seems to have a striking continuity with the Victorian poetics and further suggests his journey towards modernist Romanticism.

The varied movements, which Yeats studied or witnessed, coupled with innumerable other influences, formed the basis of Yeats’ ideology on literature in general, art of drama, poetry and poets, and form and content in literature. Yeats’ perceptions and notions on these aspects and genres of literature have been taken up for a close perusal in this study. The Celtic Twilight period of Yeats’ literary voyage was marked by a surge of literary movements such as Symbolism, Surrealism, Expressionism, Imagism, Impressionism and Dadaism. Driven by an insatiable inquisitiveness, Yeats studied, analysed and tried to inculcate some of the tenets of these schools into his poetry and prose. However, his initial poetics was shaped most profoundly by his association with Aestheticism, Pre-Raphaelite art and the French Symbolism. With these influences, he compounded his enduring interest in mysticism and occult. Fascinated by the figurative art of the Pre-Raphaelites, he was most taken in by their pictorial art, replete with a profusion of vibrant colours, elaborate details, and repetitive forms. He adored the clear and distinct images, the strange beauty and the visionary stance depicted in these paintings. Having grown up in the age of Pre-Raphaelitism, it was but natural for him to concede: “I had learned to think in the midst of the last phase of Pre-Raphaelitism” (E&I 346). A painter himself, he had studied and admired a number of Pre-Raphaelite paintings which find reference in many of his letters, essays and autobiographies. The religious paintings of the Pre-Raphaelites especially overwhelmed Yeats and inspired him to devise unification of literature and the visual arts.

Among the early Pre-Raphaelite influences was his own father John Butler Yeats, a painter who shaped Yeats’ ideology about art. Yeats especially admired his father’s illustration of Browning’s “In a Gondola” and “Pippa Passes.” Holding Rossetti, William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones in high esteem, he considered them exponents of the art form which transposed men into an ideal state of beauty, away from the ugliness and despondence of the modern times. Like other Decadents, Yeats too adopted and popularized the eroticized medievalism and pictorial techniques advocated most profoundly by Rossetti
and Edward Burne-Jones. Rossetti also provided the specific inspiration for Yeats intellectual circle of the Rhymers which the latter acknowledged thus: ßRossetti was a subconscious influence and perhaps the most powerful of allß (Au 302). Thus for Yeats, visual arts were the conduits for his vision of the world as an all-inclusive concept where art, culture and all social institutions were interlaced to form a larger integrated whole and further led to the organic integration of inner self and the somatic self to achieve ßUnity of Being.ß

Similarly, the second phase of Pre-Raphaelitism called Aesthetic Pre-Raphaelitism and the subsequent Arts and Crafts movement in the 1850s left an indelible imprint on Yeats mind. William MorrisßArt and Craft movement especially captivated his attention not only because of its analogy to literature but also because it rested on the premise of inherent connection between art and poetry. Yeats found unflinching evidence of the same impulse in Morrisßart that he believed ßstirred the romantics.ß According to Yeats:

The movement most characteristic of literature and art and to some extent of the thought too, of our century has been romanticism. It marked the regained freedom of the spirit and imagination of man in literature. Since then, painting in its own turn has flung aside the old conventions. The arts of decorations are now making the same struggle. They have been making it for some years under the leadership of William Morris. (UP I 183)

Like Morris, Yeats advocated the late Romantic affinity towards the picturesque rather than the dramatic. Though many ascribe Yeatsßpropensity towards Pre-Raphaelitism to his association and admiration for Morris, Yeats hardly critiques the latterßpoetry in detail to substantiate this claim. A promoter of ßArt for Art sakeßtheory initially, Yeats was instrumental in setting up the Rhymerßclub which had some like-minded artists such as Ernest Rhys, John Davidson, Arthur Symonds and Oscar Wilde as its members. Walter Pater who believed that art need not serve any utilitarian materialistic purpose encouraged Pre-Raphaelite tendencies in the group. The publication of Journals ßstudioß, ßThe Domeß, and ßThe Pageantßfurthered the popularity of the Rhymers.

Thus inspired, Yeats had also embarked on exploring dramaturgy to expound his poetics through the medium of drama. Some of the most acclaimed dramatic works of Yeats belonged to his early period and were similar to his verse in both substance and treatment. Thus The Shadowy Waters, The Countess Cathleen, The Land of Heart’s Desire, On Bailey’s
Strand, The King’s Threshold and Deirdre are all Pre-Raphaelite in expression and treatment; pregnant with symbolism and mysticism and replete with details, colour and light. The formal characteristics such as colour, pattern and line which he found perfected in Pre-Raphaelitism remained the standards of aesthetic judgment for Yeats throughout his life. Even, Blake’s literary art was viewed by Yeats through the lens of Pre-Raphaelitism and consequently, Yeats considered him the forerunner of the movement. Thoroughly taken in by Blake’s imagination and vision to create mythology, Yeats christened one of the sections of essays based on a phrase used by Blake “The Ideas of Good and Evil.” As he matured, his horizon expanded to include appreciation of diverse movements such as that of the Impressionists whom he admired for their ability to see nature “afresh.Ô He had high regard for the artistic achievements of Cezanne, Van Gogh, and Martini. Their works inspired him to re-examine his earlier perceptions and assumptions about Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic aim of pursuit of ÔArt for Art sakeÔ and to broaden his concept of it and art in general by shifting his focus on an implicit evaluation of an artist rather than the school he expounded. Thus by claiming integration as the major principle of what he called Ôfour more profound Pre-Raphaelitism,Ô Yeats abstracted from a historical movement an ahistorical aesthetic standard.

The movement which nurtured Yeats’ critical and creative fecundity further was French Symbolism as popularized by Mallarme. The early symbolist views of Yeats, like the French symbolist theatre rejected realism. Yeats was essentially a Romantic in using symbolism to denigrate realism and to augment visionary appeal in literature. Since his literary outputs epitomize his poetics, we see symbolism mixed with Irish myth in a tragic and a heroic vein in On Baile’s Strand (1904), and Deirdre (1906). In his book Romantic Image,Ô Frank Kermode asserts that Ôin Yeats’ ideas, the doctrine of symbol was a natural continuation from Blake to Mallarme showing that many Fin-de-siècle trends were, in fact, deviations of RomanticismÔ (Kermode 65). In his essay ÔSymbolism in Painting,Ô Yeats asserts that the symbols give Ôlumb things voices and bodiless things bodiesÔ (E&I 147). He also believed that Ôin the hands of him that has the secret; it (symbol) is a worker of wonders, a cellar full of angels or devils.Ô In the same essay, he quotes with approval a German symbolist who insisted that Ô..symbolism said things which could not be said so perfectly in any other wayÔ (E&I 146).

For Yeats, Ô..all the continuous indefinable symbolism Ô is the substance of all styleÔ (E&I 155). As such, his works are replete with images which, by a particular potency
of context or a richness employed upon them by him, seem intricate enough to hold a world of meaning. Many of them carried private and personal connotations for the poet, prompting him to use them again and again. Yeats strongly believed that the indefinable yet precise emotions possessed by full sounds, all colours, all forms arise either from its pre-ordained energies or from long association (E&I 156). Unlike Blake, who believed that symbols were a means to reach the universality of God, Yeats held that Symbolism was a hand pointing the way into some divine labyrinth (156) Nevertheless, both agreed that symbols had the power to evoke the world beyond the senses and reveal the inner elements of rhythm and patterns that distinguish one thing from another. Yeats was confident that symbolism could alter the substance, form and style of literature and art. In Art and Ideas, Yeats says:

When I began to write, I sought some symbolic language reaching far into the past and associated with the familiar names and conspicuous hills that I might not be alone amid the obscure impression of senses. (E&I 349)

Believing that most symbols originate from the common repository of symbols and images- the Anima Mundi, Yeats regarded it as a dynamic reality with ever-extending borders. Certain that the collective mind provides the universal patterns and underpins the experiences which the poet or an artist echoes, enlarges or simulates, Yeats reiterates the importance of symbolism to literature. According to Tindall: Yeats learned from Blavatsky that Anima Mundi, a reservoir of all that has touched mankind, may be evoked by symbols (Tindall 244). In this sense, this concept closely resembles Jung’s universal unconscious and has an inherent relationship with the psychological truths innate in human beings. Thus for him, words, magic and symbols remained inseparable from his poetic beliefs. He used symbolism as an effective medium to convey emotions through carefully structured words. As recognition of his contribution and allegiance to symbolism, a book entitled The Symbolist Movement in Literature was dedicated to him in 1899. Association with Symbolism led Yeats to find fault with the realists like Ibsen and Shaw, whom he regarded bourgeois moralists. He censured their realistic plays for lacking poetic beauty, vision and exultation. Concurrently, the developments on the modern stage had begun to perplex him.

Christened the conscious heir of the Romantics by Harold Bloom, and a self-confessed Last Romantic, Yeats conceptualized Romanticism not merely as a movement confined to a particular epoch but as a vision transcending time for he traced it back to Dante, Horace and Sophocles and regarded Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats and Shelley as
exponents of this school. His poetics and early works carried discernible features of Romanticism such as romantic sentiments, melodious tones, self-consciousness and doubt, hesitation, mysterious melancholy, the solitudes of nature, and infinite introspections. He also extolled traditional sanctity and beauty as ideals. His Romanticism perceived sensual and spiritual imagination superior to logic and realism. He was certain that the play of imagination in the creative process could not be obliterated or subjugated to any other element. Imagination to him was the highest faculty, imbued with the ability to transcend and transmute the present reality. His theory of poetics, thus endorsed giving free play to imagination sans any restrictions imposed by rationale and logic. He avers: "I wished for a system of thought that would leave my imagination free to create as it chose and yet make all that it created, or could create, part of the history and that of the souls (Au xi)." Similarly, his disparagement against the Realists was primarily because their "photographing of life" seemed grossly unimaginative to him. Moreover, he was convinced that an age of imagination would eventually replace the age of criticism, although he also realized that subsequently the "new imagination" would be different from the previously romantic one as represented by Spenser, Blake, Shelley and Yeats himself.

Vision, prophesy, primitive myths and legends, according to Yeats, could lend resonance and profundity to poetry and prose. In the essay "The Celtic Element in Literature," Yeats asserts that only that literature is great which is "constantly flooded with the passions or beliefs of ancient times" (E&I 185). For him, great art was a "traditional statement." Yeats believed that the best Romantics - Shelley, Blake, Keats and Coleridge had definite leaning towards magic and Neo-Platonism. As such for him, "The Ancient Mariner," "Kubla Khan" and "Christabel" were not merely ballads, but mystical dreamlike verses and apt examples of visionary and revelatory romanticism. In fact, Yeats tried to establish that Shelley, Coleridge and Wordsworth believed in the idea of ancient memory which could be invoked by communing with the disembodied souls in the Anima Mundi.

Whatever his critical and literary affirmation regarding Romanticism be, it is certain that he romanticized Ireland - its bounteous natural beauty, its magnificent traditions and the Gaelic folk tales which he used voraciously to further the cause of Ireland and his own craft. He threw himself whole heartedly into Celtic Renaissance and emerged not only as its chief exponent but also a propagandist by establishing Irish Literary Theatre in 1892. His early poetry and plays based on Irish myths and legends display the major elements of English
Romanticism; and include translations from Irish folk tales, and the influence of Arts and Craft Movement to create some of the best pieces of English literature. His collaborations with Lady Gregory and others to collect and anthologize Irish folktales indicate the critical perspicacity of Yeats in sifting through the abundant oral Gaelic folklores to choose especially those which embodied the essence of Irishness and could further the cause of Nationalism.

Here, it may also be considered that Yeats was not a romantic in the conventional sense for he did not show pure adoration for all things in nature. With his mounting obsession for the Irish nationalist cause, his artistic and critical inventiveness underwent a dramatic change and so did his perception of Romanticism. He did not preach others to emulate the Romantics. Yeats was also convinced that even one’s own Romanticism could not remain constant and underwent change as one matured as an artist and responded to the changing socio-political contemporary scenario. Thus although in the beginning he imitated the style, mannerism, vocabulary and also the Byronic Heroes of the Romantics he admired, he soon moved on from the romantic sighing to the worldly realistic plain speaking tenor of the modernists. The former appreciation of and focus on romantic love, loss and longing in both - his own earlier verses and those of others, and their conventionally familiar rhyme schemes, metric patterns and poetic structures gave way to some modernistic tendencies at the turn of the century. Yet, concomitantly he also openly supported the expression of the impassioned emotions of an individual rather than rhetorically expressing insightful thoughts as promoted by the modernists.

Emerging on the literary scene at the turning point between the Victorian period and Modernism, Yeats had the conflicting currents of both the ages. He initiated his transition from tradition which dated back to Dante, and included most prominently Blake and Shelley. Regarding Dante as a foil to high Romantics and a heroic predecessor, free from all faults, Yeats held him in high esteem and emulated his style. At the same time, his association with Pound is often held responsible for his tentative entry into modernism. Other factors such as the socio-political upheavals in Ireland, and influence of Blake and Nietzsche on him also attributed to his increasing awareness of the modernist mode of writing. Consequently, his later works evolved in tone, content, technique and complexity from his earlier works. Although in the 1930s, Yeats denounced the (E)Ezra, Eliot, Auden School (L 83) as is evident
from his letters written to Dorothy Wellesley and Olivia Shakespear, his writings display the onset of some modernist traits.

The catastrophe of the war, which had shaken the faith of the literary fraternity in the ethical basis, rationality and stability of European civilization and raised doubts about the adequacy of the traditional literary modes to represent the ruthless and dissonant realities of the post-War world, had hit Yeats as well. He, too, responded to the radical individualism, mistrust of institutions such as government and society, and disbelief in absolute truths which underscore modernistic art and literature. The threat of impending war and the sad realities and hardships of life had urged the writers of the modern epoch to take up humanitarian aspect in literature. Yeats also responded to the same especially in his later poems. For instance, in "Easter 1916," he feels even for the rivals: "He had done most bitter wrong / To some who are near my heart" (SP 94). Similarly, in his critical writings, he began to denounce artificiality of diction and form, and promoted common language as the mode of poetic expression. He even propagated use of free-verse, irregular line lengths, tighter syntax and far more succinct and potent language, and tried to imbibe them into his writings, although not always successfully.

The modernist penchant for frequent experimentation with the verse forms, interest in the contemporary politics, abandoning of the literary traditional conventions and vehement questioning of the Romantic notion of poetry as an expression of truth and beauty lyrically was diametrically opposed to Yeats's critical ideology. However, true to his vacillating self and anxious to imbibe into his craft the prevalent influences in literature, he accepted the modernist approach to literature and consequently, there is a perceivable shift in his style and tenor over the course of his literary career. Nevertheless Yeats did not approve much of Eliot's deliberately ambiguous, fragmented and deconstructed narrative and densely allusive style. In his essay "Modern Poetry," Yeats posits about Eliot thus:

In the third year of the War came the most revolutionary man in poetry during my lifetime, though his revolution was stylistic alone. T. S. Eliot published his first book. No romantic word or sound, nothing reminiscent, nothing in the least like the painting of Ricketts could be permitted henceforth. Poetry must resemble prose, and both must resemble the prose of their time; nor there be any special subject-matter. Tristram and Iseult were not a more suitable theme than Paddington Railway station. (E&I 499)
Atrophy to imagination and abstractions were perhaps the principal threats to an artist which led Yeats to distrust and disdain the Modernists. Preferring logical straightness and direct simple speech to express personal experience more than the external realities of the world, it is through his analytical opposition of the literary trends of the modern era, that he allied himself more closely with the Romantics than the Modernists and did not share much of the latter's ideology. Thus if for Eliot, a critic's primary function was explication of works of art and correction of taste; Yeats, as a practicing critic, took up the role as a promoter of art and a propagandist of nationalist sensibility. True to the Romantic spirit, Yeats drew much of his material from his life, and consequently, he deemed subjective and autobiographical elements as vital source for prose and fiction while the Modernists clearly favoured objectivity, and obliterated personal emotions to depict man's vulnerability, scepticism and emotional detachment. Yeats had no interest in the trivialities of the modern life which formed the basis of much of the Modernists' writings which he disparagingly referred to as the "filthy modern tide." He saw Romanticism as the anti-dote to the crass and flux of Modernism. In fact, to him, the Romantic Movement and the idealist philosophy appeared "correspondential" movements (E&I 404-5) opposed to the realism and naturalistic philosophy. Yeats saw in modernism, a reflection of Realism which he detested as it obliterated both the belief in the spiritual truth and the expression of personality.

Cohering with his protégé Pound, Yeats may have begun to explore objective subjects and represented certain upheavals of the modern society yet whilst Pound, despite his apparent scorn for the Romantic age, displayed the Mediterranean spirit of Romanticism, Yeats remained true to the Celtic and occult Romanticism. Nevertheless, Pound was a dynamic modern who abhorred the Romantic mysticism and rhetorical excesses which Yeats propagated. His was a direct, empirical approach which expounded that "poetry should be at least as well written as prose" (Pound, Circa 1910). Further, the elimination of superfluous verbiage and deliberate induction of stiffness and precision, terseness and dynamic metrical sequence which Pound suggested did not find much favour with Yeats although he did try to modernize under Pound's tutelage.

Unequivocally rejecting the hegemony of the English over the Irish in terms of culture, supremacy and tradition, Yeats, like James Joyce, interrogated the paradigm of modernity, colonialism and national identity in his critical writings as well. Preoccupied with the romanticizing of Ireland as a land of bounteous nature, rich heritage and folklore
traditions, unlike Joyce who embraced modernity at the cost of his Irish identity, deeming the former as both desirable and imperative; Yeats repulsed it as a corruption and regaled both in his Irish identity and his stature as the national poet of Ireland. No wonder, his works are markedly romantic and depict the idealized pastoral view of Ireland as against the urban and the technologically advanced modern world, he observed around him in London. In fact, he was perplexed by the advent of an all-encompassing capitalist expansion, industrial revolution and secularization that was gripping Ireland too. He believed Ireland to be a victim of the two-pronged offensive inflicted upon it by modernity and English colonization. To counter its overpowering influence, Yeats invoked and promoted the Gaelic myths and traditional orientations as a reaction to the modern sensibility. His assertion that he wrote as men have always written, also negates the contention that he had adopted Modernism in letter and spirit under the influence of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot. However, his rejection of the War Poets and their exclusion from The Oxford Book of Modern Verse is profoundly indicative of his anti-Modernist views on the subject matter and language of poetry. Analogous to this is his decry of the over-realistic standpoint of the modern poetry which believed not so much in imaginative creativity but in mechanically recording the proceedings of life.

However, those who regard Yeats as an exponent of modernist verse vouch for a secure place for him in the annals of history, along with the likes of Marcel Proust, Thomas Mann, James Joyce, Franz Kafka, Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot. They trust that like other Modernists, he shows a distinctive shift from an epistemological aesthetics to ontological aesthetics, from the subjective to the objective, and from knowledge-based aesthetics to a being-based aesthetics. Although literary Modernism carried no inherent attraction for Yeats, yet keeping pace with the changing times, sensibilities and tastes of the audience, he too tried to integrate his romanticism with the modernity, both in his poetry and critical thought. Thus from the early entirely romantic tendencies most clearly apparent in the poems such as The Song of Wandering Aengus, The Lake Isle of Innisfree, The Stolen Child and The Wild Swan of Coole, he moved on to a new voice with a more modern air in poems like Adam’s Curse, The Byzantium Poems, Among School Children and Lapis Lazuli etc. However, within the critical milieu, he had his definite reservations about the monotonous structure of the modern writings.

Since overtly Yeats was neither strictly Romantic nor Modernist in his stance or outlook, it is a daunting task to associate Yeats with either. To begin with, his theory of Mask
which symbolizes the confrontation of one’s self with one’s spiritual opposite in order to express an antithetical personality is different from either the Romantic egotism or the Modernist notion of dramatic medium. He used the mask deftly to explore the various possibilities of life, rather than one single solution. This holds true for his creative and critical dogma as well. He did not adhere to only one style, form or movement. He moulded and re-jigged every pattern or norm to suit his purpose. Ellmann explains Yeats’s innovative style thus: "No Pattern sufficed him for long—since he found each too forcible an arrest of the changing world. Therefore, in the light of the new experience every formulation had to be destroyed and a new one attempted." (Ellmann, Review 186).

Thus the dilemma which Yeats faced at the turn of the century seemed a product of his overzealous and erudite predilections. Yeats could neither solely adhere to his romantic leanings nor remain immune to the emerging concerns of the modernist society. He made deliberate effort to reconcile and imbibe both into his poetics. It is more in his poetry than in his prose that Yeats seems to embody the concerns and the issues agitating the modern psyche. Disillusioned by lack of harmony and strength in contemporary social and cultural backdrop, Yeats tried to revive the ancient spells and chants to bring about accord and integration in the modern society, torn apart by conflicts and dissents. After the turn of the century, his emphasis on social alienation and the barrenness of materialistic culture as themes remained paramount. The new world, created post-War and the unrest in Ireland inspired him to write in a more realistic and modernist vein.

Nevertheless, despite his growing awareness of the Modernist sensibilities, Yeats’s style of writing was quite different from the strikingly innovative, polished, witty and trained complexity of thought of T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. He was not modernist in the sense Eliot was, for unlike the latter, Yeats did not accept that literature should merely echo, observe and describe the industrial age or present the realities of life unimaginatively. However, both Eliot and Yeats believed in the eternity of the soul and the history of man. Both perceived history as an image of the soul and critiqued the present epoch in their own distinctive way. That is why Eliot’s The Wasteland and Yeats’s The Second Coming express the fear of disintegration of the world and the emergence of a formidable future. Both wrote apocalyptical poetry, though from a varying perspective on the causes, nature and desirability of the approaching apocalypse. Yeats envisioned man’s vulnerability and inescapability against the adverse, historical cycles while Eliot held man’s spiritual barrenness, rejection of
God, and the decadence of civilization as the sources of the imminent apocalypse. Parallel to the growing awareness of the realities of modern life, there was a transformation in his poetic theory and critical thought which found its intense manifestation in *A Vision*. A treatise on psychological analysis, *A Vision* apart from inspiring Yeats to write great poetry also helped him draw inferences on his contemporaries and predecessors by appraising them, and classifying their character and creativity according to the 28 phases of moon of the Great Wheel devised by him. Thus it can be regarded as an important document which explicates Yeats's poetic beliefs.

Mistrust in democracy is another significant notion which went unswervingly against the grain of modern beliefs in Yeats's critical writings. In his writings, he displays his abhorrence for the political developments and critiqued them in his Senate speeches and Essays openly. Denigrating democracy to the lowest common denominator, he deemed it as an act of levelling down or degrading the level of excellence by empowering the masses with undeserving power. Apparently, he preferred government by a few capable and intelligent people rather than by a quantity of people, sharing power and responsibility amongst them all. He was convinced that more men in the government did not ensure better working of the government. Yeats was also hostile to modern industry and commerce which is regarded as the basis of social welfare and wealth in a society. He also bore authoritarian hostility to the modernist approach to tradition and past. He thought it to be paradoxical, for while lamenting the loss of the sense of tradition, modernism also celebrates the liberation from the past. The challenge for Yeats was to straddle over this transitional period, while retaining his penchant for Romanticism, and be accepted in the modern world as an established writer. Consequently, he undertook fusion of the two movements into his own creative and critical writings.

Moreover, the early modern period was an age of poet-critics and in this respect, Yeats's venture into literary criticism was in keeping with the trend. With the advent of new schools and movements in literature in general and poetry in particular, a critical revolution had engulfed the literary field. Typically, each innovation in style was accompanied with a deluge with essays, reviews, lectures and manifestoes - a trend which also inspired Yeats to write prolifically on a variety of issues and concerns. Nevertheless, he continued to write in his quintessential anecdotal style, marked alternatively with general observations and
particular critiques of men and their works in a simple colloquial tenor interspersed by his broad-spectrum musings on life and its manifestations.

In poetry, Yeats tried to fit the modernist expressions of everyday speech into the traditional lyric form but failed to modernize. However, he had no patience for the triviality and incompressibility of modern poetry. While the rejection of imagination irked him, paradoxically, many of his later poems demonstrate the worst features of modernism such as triviality, obscurity and incompressibility which he claimed to despise. In this regard, Daniel Albright emphatically asserts in ÒYeats and Modernism,Ó that ÒYeats fights modernism as hard as he can, only to find himself acknowledging that he is a modernist to the marrow of his bonesÓ (Howes 76). It seems that Yeats tried to fuse together Romanticism and Modernism, however this fusion was more pronounced in his poetry than in his prose or critical writings.

A discerning study of the tenets of both the schools and an analysis of the techniques and modes through which Yeats tried to transmute from one movement to the other is indeed a challenging task. Since he amalgamated into his armoury, the doctrine of multiple movements and ideologies, it is hard to identify Yeats with a definite school - Romanticism, Classicism or Modernism, for although a partaker of the elements of all schools, he was not consistent in his adherence with any particular school. Any such endeavour becomes challenging because of the inherent contradictions and irregularities within his ideology and writings. The confutations and paradoxes present in YeatsÓart are highlighted by Marjorie Howes who feels that Óhis thoughts were profoundly dialectical, for nearly every truth he made or found, he also embraced a counter-truth, a proposition that contradicted the first truth, was equally true, and did not negate itÓ (Howes 207).

This study is a humble attempt to broadly examine YeatsÓwritings and to comprehend the critical and poetic beliefs as embodied in his numerous prose works such as his critical essays, autobiography, letters to acquaintances and friends, and forewords and introductions written by him. The focus of the study is to try and decipher the multitudinous meanderings of his critical ingenuity with special reference to the dominant Romantic streak in his poetics. It also aims at explicating some of the related inconsistencies and antimonies which abound his prose. The study will concentrate on his perceptions on the definition, purpose and nuances of literature, its relationship with art; and his vision of criticism as a genre to decode the underpinning contradictions inherent within the plethora of his critical credo. It will also
focus on Yeats’s emphasis on form and content as modes of expression. Since, his poetry is also a profound statement on literary criticism; it cannot be obliterated from the preview of investigation. Hence the critical ideas embedded in his poetry, his assessment of his own poetry, and those of others from Dante to the Modernists like Eliot and Pound will also be analysed briefly. Nevertheless, the primary focus will be to establish whether he is essentially an inheritor of the Romantic legacy, or does he repudiate it to adopt Modernism in letter and spirit. The study undertaken is suggestive rather than exhaustive or inclusive because of the enormous magnitude of Yeats’s literary accomplishments. For the purpose, the study has been divided into the following chapters:

The second chapter "On Literature in General" concentrates on Yeats’s demeanour as a reviewer, a polemic journalist and a literary critic. Yeats’s critical precepts were guided by sureness of instinct and soundness of his judgment. A fastidious writer, his cerebrations of art and literature elucidate the quintessential spirit of literature which enriches the aesthetic experience. The chapter expounds Yeats’s notion of literature especially poetry, its purpose, its components and devices as also the challenges which besiege an artist. It also explains how the entire gamut of his critical oeuvre reveals him as a critic, driven more by his idealism than reason or scientific temperament. His critical insights into the essential vitality of the writers is often quite discerning and illuminating, primarily because they come from a practising artist rather than a professional critic. His hope for the substitution of the age of criticism by an age of imagination and revelation, and his concept of Symbolism as a literary movement and an essential component of literature is also dealt with in the chapter. The study also elucidates his concept of Romanticism which acknowledges the supremacy of imagination over all other faculties and his notion of mask, persona and rhythm as integral to literature. Yeats’s antagonism towards realism for the candid depiction of reality on the premise that art creates rather than reflects reality is also highlighted. The chapter also unravels his provinciality and prolixity, which are indispensable to his poetics and associate him most firmly with the Romantics.

Chapter three "On Form and Content" evaluates Yeats’s perception of these two entities that have perplexed the philosophers over ages because of their indivisibility and interdependence on one another. The study also takes into account the contribution of the Rhymers in formulating Yeats’s theory of form and content. His preference for the lyrical and dramatic forms rather than epics or free verse is also studied. This chapter deals with Yeats’s
penchant for traditional verse form and his notion of rhythm, diction, syntax, versification and imagery as the structural devices of form. For Yeats, symbols embodied the abstract visually and thus accentuated the effect of the content. This chapter takes up Yeats' poetry to establish the inextricable correlation of the process and product of artistic creation. It also studies his shift from subjective, personal and vague concerns towards objective and thought provoking subjects pertaining to varied facets of human predicament and nature. His ambivalence towards form and content and his censure of the Modernists for their monotony in structure and form is also investigated here. For Yeats, more than creating new works, it was the search for apposite content which posed a greater challenge. The study features the Romantic forms and themes which constitute the matrix of Yeats' Poetics. Thus an endeavour has been made to study the currents and cross-currents which electrify Yeats' poetics.

Chapter four explores Yeats' predilections "On Poetry and Poets." The chapter focuses on Yeats' poetic beliefs regarding poetry as a genre of expression of emotions, and internal conflicts; the pragmatics that govern poetry; its relationship with religion, art and sculpture; the task of a poet and an artist; and his critique of various poets. Reposing his faith in the superiority of poetry, Yeats deemed it a permanent entity and even capable of replacing religion. Yeats elaborates on the poet's vision and concerns for the society. A scrutiny of his poetics reveal his anxiety at the dwindling of poetic imagination, the inevitability of the repetition of timeless themes, the indispensability of rhythm, metaphors and symbols in poetry. This chapter also takes up Yeats' evaluation of several poets especially the Romantics with whom he traced his lineage. A scrutiny of Yeats' choice of poets in his controversial anthology The Oxford Book of Modern Verse, which drew flak for misrepresentation, under representation and arbitrary selections made by him, is also carried out in this chapter.

Chapter five entitled "On the Art of Drama" makes a perusal of Yeats' critical opinion on dramaturgy. Since his poetics and his craft were intrinsically interwoven, allusions to his dramas will also be made. The study will also focus on how Yeats used his plays deftly for the nationalistic cause, and romanticized Ireland by choosing his heroic characters, themes and plots from the Gaelic and Celtic folklores. He invoked the artistic license in re-imagining the myths and folktales by deviating from the original to make them conducive for the contemporary epoch. This chapter also highlights his critical dramatic theory which advocates several alterations to the contemporary stage and conventions of drama to make the
staging of plays more effective and esoteric. His boldest experimentation with the Japanese Noh plays and his various collaborations to present a superlative model for drama are also dealt with in some detail in this chapter. This chapter also incorporates a perusal of Yeats's spearheading initiative to launch a nationalist theatre, his hostility towards the realistic theatre for obliteration of imagination, and his conviction that drama is a ritual of lost faith.

The last chapter titled "Conclusion" attempts to determine Yeats's pro-Romantic stance despite his awareness of, and association with the Modernists. Although, the Modernist streak in his oeuvre cannot be categorically denied, it is, indeed, subservient to his Romantic propensity. This chapter also ascertains that despite the inherent antimonies, and contradictions in Yeats's critical mediations, and the lack of conclusiveness and his constant experimentations, he was driven by definitive and fundamentally Romantic critical acuity.

Thus this study titled "W. B. Yeats as a Critic: A Study of his Poetic Beliefs" is an endeavour to examine some of the major aspects of Yeats's critical achievements. It is also a modest attempt to discern his perceptions about literature especially poetry and drama. The study aims to provide new insights into hitherto ignored aspects of his critical ideology and to refute certain charges against him which view his critical ideas as exotic, irrelevant to the modern creative needs, and therefore, of no contemporary value. An attempt will also be made to answer certain queries about Yeats's poetics and critical oeuvre. It will investigate the dialectical nature of his critical observations and implied beliefs; trace the abundant contradictions and antimonies in his critical credo; the extent to which Yeats assimilates Romanticism viz a viz Modernism in his poetics, and whether he can be classified as a Romantic, a Modernist or a marginal Modernist. Approaching Yeats from a new perspective, for not much critical investigation has been made on Yeats as a literary critic; the study intends to establish him as an astute literary critic with Romantic moorings. However, since the magnitude of Yeats's poetic and critical contribution to English literature is voluminous, the study undertaken is suggestive rather than exhaustive or inclusive.