CHAPTER II
ON LITERATURE IN GENERAL

In the foreword to his seminal work *W. B. Yeats: Man and the Poet*, N. Jeffares had declared, "Yeats’ greatness is secure" (Jeffares vii). This statement holds true even today for there is perhaps hardly any other writer who can match William Butler Yeats in his dedicated craftsmanship, spectacular thematic range, technical virtuosity and voluminous output in the field of English Literature. Having won admiration for his unflagging commitment to his craft from the likes of T. S. Eliot who deemed Yeats as "the greatest poet of his times" (A Commentary 612), and an artist for whom "Art was greater than the artist..." (Eliot, *Poet* 199), Yeats dominated the literary scene for more than five decades. Yeats’ heterogeneity and complexity of critical thought set apart his literary ingenuity and productiveness from other literary figures. Apart from his accomplishments as a poet and a dramatist, his contribution as a freelance critic and editor, although underplayed by most critics, cannot be ignored. A consummate artist and a valuable thinker, his critical endeavour was driven by an urge to popularize literature amongst the common men and to make them comprehend literature and to appreciate "good art" and "high thinking." He expounded this idealism as a new philosophy of literature, especially in his collection of essays. Endowed with a profound capability of welding and binding varied influences which shaped his creative consciousness, his literary criticism exhibited the lively reaction and responsiveness of a critic to the various artistic and ideological needs of his age.

This journey into the literary world had not been easy for Yeats as psychological, philosophical and technical difficulties impeded his literary growth. Complexities caused by financial anxieties, overbearing filial pressure, his divergent interests, his perplexing philosophical intent, urge for capacious literary output, and failing health had to be resolved before he could establish himself as a writer of repute. However, factors such as an easy access to an extensive library, and exposure to the best literary and artistic minds at a rather young age encouraged Yeats to devise his own philosophical system and ideology. Intrinsically interwoven with his literary theory were his esoteric studies. Magic, illusions, "evocation of spirits, the visions of truths in the depths of mind" (E&I 38) and astrology - all found place in his literary works. Apart from these, the philosophy acquired from the magical order of the Golden Dawn, Rosicrucian lore and the Kabbalah were integral to his craft. His
association with Ireland further helped him experience the mystical folk elements of the peasantry in rural Ireland.

Imbibing into his critical thought the primary tenets of all the major movements of his times, Yeats devised his own precepts and poetics. Under the influence of mysticism and his hostility towards reason and rationality as promoted by the Age of Enlightenment, Yeats displayed definite receptiveness towards Romanticism. He was immensely appreciative of its emphasis on originality, inspiration, intuition, imagination and feelings as the guiding principles of literature. It is through his analytical opposition of the literary trends of the modern era, apparent more radically in his prose, that he allies himself more closely with the Romantics and the Victorians rather than the Modern writers. Thus a confluence of varied factors and influences led Yeats to formulate a discrete yet liberal notion of literature which he presented not in any logical and coherently devised manner, but in fragments, strewn across the array of his capacious writings.

This chapter while broadly concentrating on Yeats' observations regarding literature will try to discern the dialectical nature of many of his critical observations, his aesthetics and his implied and critical beliefs. An integral part of his vast and miscellaneous output is formed by Yeats' critical essays and introductions to anthologies and prefaces. Beginning as a reviewer-critic of the Irish predecessors, he also appraised the English Romantics, and proposed his own concept of the Romantic tradition quite early in his career as a critic. Inspired by Blake, Shelley, Keats and Hallam, Yeats not only recognized their critical abilities but also formulated his own critical concepts based on their ideas. O'Leary, Ezra Pound, J. M. Synge, Matthew Arnold and Nietzsche also contributed to the development of his critical beliefs. Written on an assortment of subjects, his prose writings provide an insight into his exceptionally wide knowledge, intellectual curiosity and enlightened consciousness. Endowed with flexibility, ease and freshness of a living speech, they display taste and tact, humour and anecdotes with unfailing lucidity and grace thereby lifting them above the hackneyed and the common place.

Having begun writing in the fin de siècle, a period of cultural transition and aesthetic innovation - a time when the social role of an artist as the catalyst of change was contentious, Yeats continued to profoundly influence the literary scene with his contributions in multifarious genres. His views on literature, art and aesthetics found expression not only in his poems, plays and essays but also in the abundant correspondence which he exchanged.
with his acquaintances and friends. These letters provide an insight into his writing style, ideas, inspiration and character. He used these genres variously to evaluate other writers; question, explain and justify his own craft; to meditate over the movements he began or joined; the biographies of his friends that he penned down, or to achieve objectivity even in self-criticism. Interwoven with his anecdotal accounts of places and people, movements and clubs is his opinion on the diverse aspects and components of literature in general.

In his critical essays, besides presenting the wide-ranging concerns, Yeats also took up issues such as his evolving ideas on the value and purpose of literature, the nature and genesis of popular literature, the pursuit of beauty in his works, and the role of an artist. He participated in the contemporary debates over aestheticism, politics, gender, science and philosophy, and recorded his concern on these issues in his critical writings. The corpus of his critical views, have also revolved around the importance of arts to Ireland, the relation between literature and the finer arts such as music, sculpture and painting; the importance of ancient traditions to modern writing, the innovations in the Japanese drama and other Orient art forms, and the role of rhythm in poetry. Through his essays, he has also explored his relations with the Pre-Raphaelite painters, the Romantics, his contemporaries and the Irish nationalists. These essays also embody his observations on the craft of innumerable writers of repute including William Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser, William Morris, P.B. Shelley and William Blake, to name only a few.

Beginning his literary career as a journalist and reviewer, by the time Yeats had come on the literary scene, the advances in printing technology, marketing, transportation of reading material, and expansion of literary reading public had led to the publication of many journals. This development provided a platform to the emerging writers and literary critics to voice their opinion on the contemporary trends in literature. New periodicals like *The Yellow Book*, *The Bookman*, and *The Savoy*, and popular newspapers such as *Titbits* and *The Daily Mail* had popularized journalism and given ample opportunity to writers like Yeats to exhibit their creativity, critique other writers and present their philosophy of literature. Initially, impelled by the financial anxieties of his impoverished family, soon after their arrival in London, Yeats ventured into criticism, and took up compiling of anthologies and reviewing for magazines and journals on varied subjects and genres to earn quick money. However, he maintained a flair for review-writing till the very end. Consequently, his reviews cover half a century beginning with a review of *The Poetry of Sir Samuel Ferguson* in 1886 and
concluding with that of Poems by Margot Ruddock with Prefatory Notes on the Author in 1936.

Propelled by a desire to create public receptivity to high class literature, he thought it imperative to initiate a literary movement which could expose the readers to the best in literature. In a letter to the editor of United Ireland, he wrote in 1894:

é if we are ever to have an Irish reading public we must have an Irish criticism to tell it what to read and what to avoidé [this] is not a matter in any sense for the authors but for the journalists, editors and newspaper owners of Ireland. If good criticism is written in English newspapers it will carry its due weight with the authors and the public alikeé. (qtd. in Holt 4)

Apart from editing and contributing to the Irish Theatre journals - Beltaine and Samhain, Yeats also contributed to nearly 70 other newspapers, magazines and journals. These include journals such as The Bookman, United Ireland, The (Boston) Pilot, The United Irishmen, and newspapers like The Observers, The Daily Express, The Times, The Spectators and The Evening Herald etc. One of the earliest articles regarded as a treatise on Yeats’ literary philosophy appeared in The Dublin University Review in 1886. After Samuel Ferguson’s death, Yeats wrote this article in response to two articles published in journals which allied Ferguson’s loyalty to the British Crown. Yeats challenged these articles and claimed that Ferguson was a nationalist who sang to sweeten Ireland’s wrongé (CW ix 10).

In his review, Yeats hailed Ferguson for his simplicity, lack of florid expression and the supreme gift of story-telling and imagination enough - to make history read like romance, and simplicity enough to make romance read like history (10). He concluded the article by giving a clarion call for rebirth of Gael by one who sang of the indomitable Irishry (10). Thereafter, Yeats reviewed numerous books and articles on Irish fairies, ghosts and witches, a topic very close to his heart. Some of the articles he wrote include Irish Wonders, Irish Fairies, Irish Folk Tales, and a review of collection of folk-tales.

Between 1892 and 1899, he contributed nearly 40 reviews to The Bookman, wherein he assessed and critiqued the poetry of several English poets including that of Michael Field, Savage Armstrong, Edward Ellis, Alfred Tennyson, William Blake and Robert Buchanan, as also Irish writers including Douglas Hyde: Old Gaelic Love songs. Yeats strongly felt that Celtic literature was quintessentially marked by directness and simplicity. By 1898, he saw it
as mythologized and symbolized as well. The revival of Celtic mythology, as envisioned by Yeats, seemed a consequence of the growing popularity of Symbolism and an aversion for didacticism in literature. In this regard, he compared the symbolic works of Maeterlinck, Wagner and Adam with the didactic works of Browning and Tennyson to vindicate his stand.

In 1894, Yeats wrote two significant reviews on Villers de L’Isle Adam’s *Axel*, a dramatic prose poem and Ibsen’s verse tragedy *Brand*. His review of *Axel* is recognized as the expression of the evolving, non-naturalistic stance—a paradigm of the imaginative drama of future. Yeats sketched a general account of the current developments in drama in this review and observed how the scientific movement which has swept away so many religious and philosophical misunderstandings of ancient truth has entered the English theatres in the shape of realism and Ibsenism (qtd. in Pierce III 69). He also tried to establish the growing dissatisfaction among the theatre-goers with the realistic drama thus: ‘The younger generation has grown tired of the photographing of life and has returned by the path of symbolism to imagination and poetry, the only things that are ever permanent’ (69). Similarly, in the review of *Brand*, entitled ‘The Stone and The Elixir’, Yeats justified the attention being received by Ibsen’s plays with the plea that:

And because prose is more syllogistic than poetry and because the theorist and the preacher have devoured the land like locusts, the later and less imaginative though profoundly interesting plays have been acted and expounded to the neglect of the works of his prime. (*CW* IX 257)

In this regard, Faulkner in his article ‘Yeats as a Reviewer’ avers:

Yeats’ interest in the drama was intense, and these two reviews stand out in their zest and sense of relevance. In the Symbolist attitude, Yeats was finding a satisfying definition of his critical point of view as it developed beyond the Romanticism of his youth. (Faulkner, *Bookman* 115)

In his early reviews and essays, Yeats emerged as a forceful proponent and theorist of the Irish Literary revival, though there were no set principles which governed his ideology. Devoted to the Irish cause, he endeavoured hard to propagate the fledging literary movement in Ireland. Yeats was unswerving in his endeavour to establish a more imaginative tradition in Irish literature [based on] a tradition of belief older than any European Church, and founded upon the experience of the world before the modern bias (*E & I* 256). For Yeats, the
ancient Ireland and its sagas were one of the seven great fountains in the garden of world's imagination, besides those of the Indians, the Homeric, the Spanish, the Arthurian, the tales connected with Charlemagne, and the Scandinavian cycle of legends. His participation in the Irish Renaissance helped him to develop his later style which was perpetuated primarily because of his direct contact with the people.

During 1885-95, Yeats concentrated only on Irish subjects even in the reviews he wrote. The apparent motive behind this was the promotion of a critical rather than a blindly nationalistic attitude, although the level of his success was debatable. Quite whimsically, in *A Book of Irish Verse* (1895) edited by Yeats, he ignored the popular patriotic verse of Thomas Moore and Thomas Davis and concentrated more on the writings of Douglas Hyde, William Allingham and Samuel Ferguson. He eulogized Irish nationalist writers like Carleton, Hyde, Katharine Tynan, A.E and Lionel Johnson and also approved of Richard Ashe Kings's *Swift in Ireland* as a beginning of that scholarly criticism of men and things which is needed in Ireland even more perhaps than creative literature (UP I 60). In his over enthusiasm for Irish literature, Yeats compiled a rather arbitrary list of the best Irish Books and invited the wrath of critics, for in the absence of any established literature or recognized criticism on Irish Literature, such an attempt seemed rather preposterous.

Another example of Yeats's controversial and whimsical observations has been his assessment of Samuel Ferguson as the great Irish poet whose popularity led to the establishment of the new school of Irish Literature and criticism. Yeats has been criticized for basing his judgment on an analysis of three or four poems which were rather ordinary and no way great. In his review of Symon's volume of poems *Amoris Victima*, Yeats derided the popular criticism which dismissed contemporary art as decadent or immoral. In another review, Yeats praised Robert Bridges for getting rid of heterogeneous knowledge and irrelevant analysis in his poetry. Similarly, in the course of evaluating Maeterlinck's plays, he reiterated the significance of the Symbolist movement. Even the final review which Yeats wrote for *The Bookman* had symbolism as its subject. Reiterating his faith in symbolism, Yeats had expressed his sentiments in the review of *Aglavine and Selysette* thus:

The literary movement of our times has been a movement against the external and heterogeneous; and like all literary movements, its French expression is more intelligible and obvious than its English expression. A movement which never mentions an external thing except to express a state of the soul has taken the place of
a movement which delighted in picturesque and bizarre things for their own sake. (UP II 52)

Peter Faulkner echoes similar views in an article wherein he avers: “We are in the middle of a great revolution of thought, which is touching literature and speculation alike, an insurrection against everything which assumes that external and material are the only fixed things, the only standards of Society” (qtd. in Pierce III 71). He has also elaborated on Yeats' craft in his article Yeats as a Reviewer wherein he posits:

The Bookman reviews show Yeats committing himself more and more firmly to a Symbolist view of literature as held by Arthur Symons. Yeats's aspiration for poetry to contribute to the forging of the Irish Consciousness provided a complicating element in his development, and held him back from aestheticism. It was to drive him in the next decade to create an Irish theatre, in a new direction. But the reviews bear witness to the importance for him of Symbolist ideas in the 1890s. Edmund Wilson rightly wrote of Yeats's visit to Axel's Castle: his emergence from it was to be the next stage of his unceasing mental journey. (qtd. in Pierce III 72)

Apparently, Yeats dealt with a host of issues in his reviews and critiques, and his stance in these was typically romantic, emphasizing imagination against the intellect and the mind. Complementing his father's anti-Victorian ideology, Yeats showed no patience for the Victorian love for the explicit and unrelenting moral pattern. He contended that literature could not be made liable to moral evaluation as the Victorians intended. In fact, true to his romantic proclivity, he admitted in the first draft of his Autobiography “I was romantic in all” (Mem 19).

Foraying into a distinct genre of literature - the writing of an autobiography, Yeats while exhibiting his literary dexterity in weaving characters and incidents in an anecdotal and simplistic form, also covertly expressed his opinion on this particular form of literature. In Yeats' literary armoury, Autobiographies presents an account of some of the randomly collected events, accounts of his acquaintances and anecdotes from his life. Yeats' interest in autobiography dates back to 1910, when George Moore had published the first volume of Hail and Farewell. Though censuring Moore for his inability to distinguish between public and private life, Yeats admired the book's candidness. Yeats seemed to agree with the concept of autobiography propounded by Northrop Frye as inspired by a creative and
therefore fictional, impulse to select only those events and experiences that go to build up an integrated pattern (Anatomy 307). Initially, Yeats persuaded his father to record his memoirs and later took to this genre himself. However, unlike his father who wrote disjointedly and inconsistently in his unfinished Early Memoires, Yeats displayed an instinctive understanding for the formal conventions that govern autobiography. In his Autobiographies, he not only corrected what he found lacking in his father’s attempt, but also in the process invented an effective structure for longer poems and to construct a drama out of his personal life.

Originally published in 1955, the first two sections of Autobiographies, Reveries over Childhood and Youth, (1914) and Trembling of the Veil (1922) cover his life through late twenties. In 1936, Yeats published another set of four essays – Dramatic Personae, Estrangement, The Death of Synge, and The Bounty of Sweden. This section extends into the poet’s fifties when he received the Noble Prize for literature. However, these reminiscences are in no chronological order. Rather they are selections and certain idealizations of figures and events lifted out of his personal history. Instances of self-interpretation abound in them, reflecting Yeats’ opinion on people, places and events which moulded his personality. Making no deliberate attempt to tell the truth about himself, Yeats instead focuses on using that part of the truth or partial truth which can further his cause and help him achieve a dramatic image. The essays included in Autobiographies have selections of references to Yeats’ friends and foes, to clubs and societies he joined or supervised his role in the establishment of Abbey Theatre, and his association with Irish literary Renaissance. However, Yeats avoids recording plain truths about his troubled childhood, his awkward physique, his loneliness, his impoverished upbringing, or his tone deafness. He mixes fact and fable in a highly fragmentary manner with a purposeful blurring of time, though the references to persons and places are specific and concrete. In fact, the opening of the Reveries over Childhood makes this aspect pretty clear:

My first memories are fragmentary and isolated and contemporaneous, as though one remembered some first moment of the Seven Days. It seems as if time had not yet been created, for all thoughts are connected with emotion and place without sequence. (Au 5)

Another of his essays from this collection, Trembling of the Veil is widely regarded as Yeats’ Tour de force in prose; it is a treatise on self-portraiture in which Yeats successfully reconciles the apparently discordant aspects of his personality: his role as a politician, as the
exponent of Abbey Theatre, a mystic, and a poet. This section also highlights how an autobiographer can lend an artistic design to the basic facts of life and enhance the mythological and the universal appeal of the incidents by balancing its "fictionality" with restrained specificity. "Dramatic Persona," the third segment of Yeats' autobiography seems dedicated to Lady Gregory. It is a short yet eloquent memorial record of Yeats' allegiance and indebtedness to her patronage, and provides a witty but malicious account of George Moore's affectations, and artistic incompetence. This section, instead of illustrating how Yeats' poetics or theory on literature was influenced by Lady Gregory, Synge, George Moore and Martyn, reflects more on Yeats' analysis of their personality and craft. The two middle sections "Estrangement" and "The Death of Synge" are extracts from a diary maintained in 1909, while the last section The Bounty of Sweden includes the proceedings of the occasion when Yeats was conferred with the noble prize and includes the lecture on Irish Dramatic Movement which he delivered on the occasion. Thus Yeats' autobiography does not present any didactic or explanatory accounts on literature or any other art forms nor does it critique other writers. It only attempts to fictionalize and dramatize his life. In fact, it has been conceptualized as a part of a larger scheme of things. Quest for "Unity of Being" in literature being a lifelong passion for Yeats, this book has been treated as documentation of Yeats' life, and his endeavour in achieving "Unity of Being."

Another medium or genre which Yeats used variously to supplement, augment and endorse his philosophy of literature is his Letters. An avid correspondent, he wrote quite regularly to a host of friends, contemporaries, relatives, editors and advocates. Yeats' capacious collection of letters were exchanged with an assorted group of writers and friends, especially women friends like Katharine Tynan, Maud Gonne, Lady Gregory, Florence Farr and Olivia Shakespear, to name only a few. These letters span over his entire creative time and embody Yeats' exchange of views on myriad issues. Consequently, if his letters to George Russell, Fiona Macleod, and W. Sharp elucidate his inclination towards theology, occult and his association with the Golden Dawn; to Florence Farr, his concern is more on aesthetics of the stage and the theatre, while the letters he exchanged with Katharine Tynan exemplify rational and even-handed correspondence between friends who share a common craft and similar political enthusiasm.

Similarly, Yeats exchanged views with his father on a host of topics through regular correspondence which indirectly refurbished and revitalized his critical canon. Madeleine L.
Cazamian in his essay "La Correspondence de W. B. Yeats" exhibits the special bond which Yeats shared with his father through letters, though the two were diametrically opposite in their literary ideology. Cazamian avers: 

There existed between them deep infinities; an intuitive conception of art and beauty; a very free interpretation of moral values. These are the notes that resound in this, the most affectionate and living of the correspondences, in which the son, avoiding issues which had divided them, acknowledges the spiritual bond between them, marks his admiration as much for the pen as for the brush of the elderly artist, and offers to publish his letters and memoirs in England (Cazamian 59).

Along with providing a peek into his own life as Yeats put it, these letters present his musings and annotations on a variety of subjects. Most prominently, they trace Yeats's stance on the developments in literature, especially in poetry, from W. Morris to W. H. Auden. These letters also lend depth and body to his prose by presenting a multitude of facts, opinions, episodes and portraits, apart from revealing his efforts at re-making himself. C. Day Lewis in his review *The Letters of W. B. Yeats* avers:

The Yeats who emerges from them is many-minded as Odysseus: a shrewd campaigner, timid yet combative, who knows when to be obstreperous, when tactful: immensely practical, even in his mysticism: a connoisseur of ideas rather than an original thinker: a man with the courage of his own contradictions: a man whose first principle, like Blake's and Emily Bronte's, was the imagination. (qtd. in Pierce I 517)

Thus these letters explicate a plethora of wide-ranging issues including Yeats's exchange of ideas and observations on issues such as - the art of literature, his literary plans, his review of works of his contemporaries, advice to his father to write an autobiography, enumeration of the merits of Tagore upon Edmund Gorse, his endeavours to establish Irish Literary Theatre to recording his frustration with the political developments in Ireland, and resolving differences and reconciling people to lend Abbey Theatre the highest literary quality. Even mundane issues such as repaying small debts, chasing fire balloons and planting sunflowers are recounted in them. They also express his moral strength and determination to succeed as a poet; his disappointment at his own short-comings, and an outrage at the political tumult in Ireland. His notion of the role of a poet in this world is also revealed through his letters to John Quinn: "Keats's lines telling how Homer left great verses to a little clan seem to my imagination, when I was a boy, a description of the happiest fate that could come to a poet" (qtd. in Skelton 18). These letters also reveal his struggle with
difficulties: financial, material, administrative, political and social. Thus endowed with critical acuity and analytical ability, Yeats expresses, through his correspondence, innumerable critical opinions concisely and strongly.

The letters are also a documentation of Yeats’ efforts at self-improvement and re-making himself, for he makes several self-critical statements in them. For instance, he identifies that his early poetry is not the poetry of insight and knowledge but of longing and complaint (Ellmann *Masks* 55) and that it is the cry of the heart against necessity. I hope someday to alter that and to write poetry of insight and knowledge (CL I 54-55). His frustration at his own passiveness is apparent from his letters to Dorothy Wellesley: I have a longing to escape into a new theme - I am tired of my little personal poetry, your *Matrix* has given me a glimpse of what I want (*LDW* 9). About his interest in magic, he recorded in one of his letters:

> If I had not made magic my constant study, I could not have written a single word of my Blake book, nor would *The Countess Cathleen* have ever come to exist. The mystical life is the centre of all that I do and all that I think and all that I write. (qtd. in Pierce I 525)

The complex system of thought which he had developed also depended largely on his power as a litterateur to reach inward to the power residing in the self. To Florence Farr, he tells: Even things seemingly beyond control answer strangely to what is within (qtd. in Pierce I 533). Thus there are countless examples of his critical analysis of his own oeuvre strewn across his letters. His correspondence also acts as an agency through which Yeats voiced his feelings and critiqued his contemporaries and predecessors. Writing to Katharine Tynan in 1888, he has pointed out John Meredith’s undoing in including the reader too much into reflection. In another letter, he has eulogized Nietzsche and asserted: Nietzsche completes Blake and has the same roots - I have not read anything with so much excitement since I got to love Morris’ stories and have the same curious astringent joy (L 379). In other letters he has talked of Balzac’s craft, the intense genius of Synge, and the amiability of James Joyce as also the magnanimity of the queer creature Ezra Pound. He shared with Olivia Shakespear the deep recesses of his mind as with no one else. Holding her in high esteem as an epitome of sensitivity, acute discernment and finesse, he has written to her about the most diverse and abstruse works he had read. In one of the letters, he comments thus about Maeterlinck:
In all the old dramatis, Greek and English, one feels that they are all the time thinking wonderful, and rather mournful, things about their puppets, and every now and then they utter their thoughts in a sudden line or embody them in some unforeseen action. I said to Verlaine, when I saw him last year, Does not Maeterlinck touch the nerves sometimes when he should touch the heart? (L 255)

In the letters exchanged between 1901 and 1937 with Sturge Moore, Yeats explores wide-ranging subjects like contemporary thought, the sources of inspiration for A Vision, his religious and mystical meditations on the origin of life and world, and human destiny; his collaboration with Shri Purohit Swami, and his self-elevating experience of translating Upanishads and Oriental wisdom, to name only a few. In one of his letters, he even presents his estimation of A Vision - a work wherein he has created a private mythology to replace the established religion: Ŵı have constructed a myth, but then one can believe in a myth- one only assents to philosophyò (L 781). Some letters also reveal his notion of novels and novelists. Apart from being a prolific writer of poems and plays, Yeats had shown an inclination towards this genre in his youth. Consequently, he wrote and edited several volumes of Irish stories and sketches before writing a short autobiographical novel John Sherman. He had even confessed to Katharine Tynan: Ŵı have an ambition to be taken as an Irish Novelist, not as English or cosmopolitan one choosing Ireland as a backgroundò (L 187). Hence a proliferation of annotations, estimations and observations place his letters as an integral component of his literary and critical output. In fact, they adumbrate a literary philosophy too vast and diverse to be explicated through a few examples.

However, Yeatsò capaciousness as a writer is not confined only to reviews, letters, plays and poems. He has also authored a significant body of scholarly essays written in cultured yet simplistic, conversational mode. Some of the outstanding prose works of Yeats include The Celtic Twilight (1902), Ideas of Good and Evil (1903), Discoveries: A Volume of Essays (1907), A Vision (1925), Letters to the New Islands, (1934), Pages From a Diary Written in 1930 (1940), Uncollected Prose, (1970-74) and Interviews and Recollections, to name only a few. His voluminous literary and critical output evidently displays his acuity and intellect. These essays are the most direct record of Yeatsò literary assumptions and theories. In Ireland’s Literary Renaissance, Ernest A. Boyd comments: Ŵıf style is the man, then the essays, Ŵıdeas of Good and Evilò is a perfect portrait of the authorò (177). He also regards the essays in Ŵıdeas of Good and Evilò as a Ŵıefence of Yeatsò own ideas and an
exposition of the theories underlying literature which he has helped by precept and example to create (180). In *Magic* and *Invoking the Fairies*, Yeats explores the world of the supernatural and the Gaelic folklore. In his essays *Symbolism in Poetry* and *Symbolism in Painting*, he surveys the Jungian concept of the archetypes of common symbols used by writers, across epochs and genres, to display symbolically universal emotions and situations. *The Philosophy of Shelley*. Poetry justifies the relevance of Anima Mundi and the inherent connection between the artist and the audience forged primarily by symbolism, archetypal images and supernaturalism rather than any other scientifically explainable means. These essays also demonstrate Yeats in-depth evaluation of various writers across varied genres and modes, especially some of the Romantics whom he admired and emulated. Thus Shelley is the focus of his essay *The Philosophy of Shelley*, poetry and *The Symbolism of Poetry*, while Blake artistic craft is examined by Yeats in essays like *William Blake and the Imagination* and *William Blake and The Illustrations to The Divine Comedy* (1924). He even makes a rough distinction between the bardic poets such as Homer, Hugo and Burns who sing of the universal emotions (UP I 105) and the sophisticated coterie of poets who investigate what is obscure in emotions (UP I 105).

Mostly informal, subjective, anecdotal, and exemplary in style, these essays elucidate Yeats own craft as a literary writer and critic, especially when he identifies and empathizes with his subject. They are an extension of his reviews, and offer an expanded discussion on the analogies and connections he discovered between different components such as occult and symbolism; imagination and will; self and the anti-self; and realism and romantic fantasy. Most of his essays are closely akin to the prose of conversation and are remarkable for simplicity of expression and assertion than any strenuousness of rhetoric. Using clear and concise technique, Yeats tries to exclude over emphasis, obscurity or vagueness, though not always successfully. Occasionally, he does become tedious, monotonous, and shoddy as the following:

Longfellow and Campbell, and Mrs Hemans, and Macaulay in his *Lays*, and Scott in his longer poems, are the poets of the middle class, of people who have unlearned the unwritten tradition which binds the unlettered, so long as they are masters of themselves, to the beginning of time and to the foundation of the world, and who have not learned the written tradition which has been established upon the unwritten. (*CW IV 7*)
Except for such sporadic occasions, usually Yeats' observations in criticism are illuminating and impressionistic, precisely because they are observations made by a literary figure and not by a disinterested professional critic. Yeats' prose is, indeed, the direct documentation of his divergent leanings, preferences, and perceptions about the nuances of literature. It is through them - especially the essays and letters that we learn more precisely and succinctly about his preference for poetic drama over other forms, his passion for symbolism, and his belief in the supernatural. Even his theory of imagination, the dichotomy between the self and the anti-self, and the role of Anima Mundi in his artistic design, and his definitive Romantic moorings are most profoundly explicated through his critical writings.

Bestowed with, as Katherine Tynan claims: "an uncanny faculty of standing aside and looking on at the game of life as a spectator" (Ellmann, Masks 54), Yeats used this ability to strengthen his poetics and poetry with greater tautness. Apart from seriously taking up writing of poetry and drama, Yeats meditated on the fundamentals of literature or poetics. Indubitably, the development of Yeats as a literary figure was essentially connected with his growing recognition as a literary-critic. Ellmann also avers that though Yeats was acutely self-conscious, yet it was not that of Narcissus staring fondly at his own reflection (55) but that of a parrot of his poem "An Indian Song" who rages at his own image. Thus sensitive to the literary trends, and aware of the components of good literature and literary style, he not only critiqued many of his contemporaries and predecessors but also analysed his own literary worth. In analysing his own craft, Yeats elucidated clearly the nuances of literature which set it apart from the "false coins of glittering and noisy insincerity" of rhetoric (UP I 404); of the opinions of the "newspaper hacks" (UP I 407); and the "passions and the blindness of the multitudes" (UP I 404).

A self-critic with the avowed aim of imbibing "directness and extreme simplicity" in literature (Ellmann, Masks 140), Yeats not only advocated these tenets for his fellow writers but also lamented the loss of coherence of his earlier works such as Mosada, Island of Statues and of the creeping in of the "cloud and foam" into his poetic vision. Yeats was aware of his perpetual contemplation, and self-consciousness, as also the imprecision, confusion, and incoherence in his early works which he rectified subsequently. In a letter to Katherine Tynan, dated Sept 6, 1888, he wrote:

All seem confused, incoherent, and inarticulate: yet this I know, I am no idle poetaster. My life has been in my poems. To make them I have broken my life in a
mortar as it were. I have betrayed in it youth and fellowship, peace and worldly hopes. I have seen others enjoying while I stood alone with myself - commenting, commenting - a mere dead mirror on which things reflect themselves. I have buried my youth and raised over it a Cairn - of clouds. (qtd. in Ellmann, *Mask* 54)

A continually evolving and maturing literary artist, Yeats was also quick to apprehend the occasional lack of substance and requisite fineness in his own poetics and literary works. It is out of this extreme self-consciousness, as George Russell suggests, that Yeats developed his theory of the divided consciousness - an outcome of his awareness of the vast gulf between what he was and what he desired to be. His own evolution as a creative figure transformed his critical beliefs about art and literature. A prolific thinker and analyst, he aimed at transmuting his diverse notions into a unified entity and imbibing them into his unique philosophy.

Nevertheless, Yeats was also conscious of the ever-changing preferences, intricacies and nuances of rhythm, forms and styles of literature and consequently, his critical writings are marked by complexity of literary attitude, treatment and inconsistent views on poetics. Often overwhelmed by fleeting and contradictory ideas, transitory phases, and bouts of passion, his critical oeuvre lacked systematic or definitive viewpoint on literature. His ambivalent stance on most issues led to a constant change and evolution of his opinion on the components, definition, and relevance of literature. A perusal of his diverse and voluminous writings reveals that he did not endorse a single definition of literature. The diverse components of his notion of literature, like most of his poetics, appeared in fragments strewn across a host of his writings.

Deeming literature "the principal voice of conscious\(d\) (60), Yeats was convinced that it was above the mundane classifications of genre, form, content or times. Great literature,\(d\) according to him, is always great because the writer was thinking of truth and life and beauty more than of literary form and literary fame\(d\) (\(UP I\) 62). He further believed that Literature, when it is really literature does not deal with problems of the hour but with problems of the soul and character\(d\)\(CW X\) 61). He also considered drama and lyric poetry as the voice of what metaphysicians call innate knowledge, that is to say, of consciousness for it expresses the relation of the soul to eternal beauty and truth as no other writer can express it\(d\)\(CW X 60-61\). In a review article of 1893, Yeats also emphasized the essential relation between poetry and philosophy thus: The belief\(d\) that you can separate poetry and
philosophy and from belief, is but the phantasy [sic] of an empty day (UP I 266). Consequently, he derided the growing trend amongst the British poets of divorcing poetry from philosophy with the contention that mere "photographing of life" cannot be termed good literature (UP I 323).

Within Yeats' critical matrix, his annotations and comments on the nature and function of poetry predominate over all other genres. As such, most of his critical observations and his poetic beliefs refer to poetry more than any other form. While Yeats considered experience imperative for literature, D. V. Savage in his essay "The Aestheticism of W. B Yeats: The Personal Principal" misinterprets Yeats' intentions and avers: "It is apparent that Yeats regarded it (poetry) as having no commerce with the world of experience; its task being to conjure up certain enchanted states of mind in which the mind is made aware of some bodiless timeless reality (Hall & Steinmann 199).

Reckoning literature as the medium of revelation of the truths of life, in The Irish Dramatic Movement, Yeats observes:

Literature is, to my mind, the great teaching power of the world, the ultimate creator of all values, and it is this not only in the sacred books whose power everybody acknowledges, but by every movement of imagination in song or story or drama that height of intensity and sincerity has made literature at all. Literature must take the responsibility of its power and keep all its freedom: it must be like the spirit and like the wind that blows where it listeth; it must claim its right to pierce through every crevice of human nature, and to describe that relation as it is  . (Ex 117)

However, this remark is at variance with his earlier assertion that literature should not be didactic. In fact, he disapproved of Wordsworthian literature primarily because of its overt emphasis on nature as the ultimate teacher and guide. Elsewhere, he deemed esotericism as an essential element in all admirable literature (CW X 85) which unfortunately he found in overabundance in Irish literature and poetic speech.

Distinguishing between poetry as a genre of literature and rhetoric, Yeats asserts: "We make out of the quarrel with others rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry" (My 351). Moreover, he regarded rhetoric as the triumph of the desire to convince over others the desire to reveal (UP I 420). Yeats displayed a definite abhorrence for the Victorian rhetoric
tradition for its desire to punish and reform. Concomitantly, since he vehemently disagreed with the Arnoldian notion of poetry as a criticism of life, convinced that: "Great poetry does not teach us anything" (UP I 84), he exhibited no patience for utilitarian poetry or rhetoric in literature. He firmly held that inter-personal quarrels, or those with the outer world could not be the subject of genuine or elevated poetry. This led him to dissuade political polemics in literature with the plea that recognition won by the Irish poets who wrote only to further the cause of freedom could only be temporary and not lasting. Reviewing Richard Ashe King’s Swift in Ireland in Bookman of June 1896, Yeats asserted: "imaginative literature wholly, and all literature in some degree, exists to reveal a more divine world than ours; and not to make our ploughing, and sowing, our spinning and weaving, more easy and more pleasant" (UP I 408). Although he believed that philosophy or moral ideas could not be separated from literature, yet he did not approve of writing merely for a particular ideology or moral dogma.

Believing that personal utterance, which had almost ceased in English literature, could be as fine an escape from the rhetoric and abstraction as drama itself (Au 102), Yeats cultivated in his literary oeuvre, personal utterance to escape undesirable rhetoric. Upholding the essential freedom of expression of personal and subjective elements in literature, Yeats repudiated any attempts to confine literature to a particular age, ideology or political motive. He desired it to be free from all irrelevant details and moral and scientific discursiveness and to focus most firmly on personal sentiments. In his essay "An Irish National Theatre," he clearly posits: "Literature is always personal; always one man’s vision of the world, one man’s experience and it can only be popular when men are ready to welcome the visions of others" (Ex 115). Moreover, Literature, for him, could either move upwards into ever growing subtlety until it served the cause for only a small and learned audience or downward until all was simplified and solidified again (266).

Thus these essays embody Yeats’ critical literary theory and poetics which seemed more subjective than objective. The fact that he never abandoned his role as a writer and the consequent intermingling of critical and artistic sensibilities makes his criticism rather subjective. These prose-pieces also present the continuous growth of his mind and his sustained subjectivity in criticism. The subjective impulse in Yeats’ criticism is not the logical progression from his doctrine of self-conquest, for Yeats as a critic, surveying all literature as "Art for my sake" is not disinterested, objective or scientific, but, rather impressionistic (Brater 653). To Yeats, literature essentially meant a cogent display or an
outpour of an individual’s thoughts, aspirations and emotions. In his autobiography, too, he emphasizes the importance of personal and subjective literature. Similarly, in the *Celtic Twilight*, defining literature, Yeats rhetorically asks: *What is literature but the expression of moods by the vehicle of symbols and incident?* (CT 7). In *Reveries over Childhood*, he records: *We should write out our thoughts in as nearly as possible the language we thought them in, as though in a letter to an intimate friend.* He further avers: *Personal utterance which had almost ceased in English Literature, could be as fine an escape from rhetoric and abstraction as drama itself for then it would be no longer a matter of literature at all* (Au 63).

However, quite contrary to his earlier contention that poetry is primarily personal, later Yeats asserts that an artist must transcend personal feelings to imbibe universal and diverse, often opposing emotions which he felt were aptly reflected in traditional themes and modes. Yeats juxtaposed his own observations and perception with the writings of the Rhymers to highlight the latter’s inadequacies in concentrating only on the personal element in their works.

If I wrote of personal love and sorrow in free verse, or in any rhythm that left it unchanged, amid all its accidence, I would be full of self-contempt because of my egotism and indiscretion, and foresee the boredom of my reader. I must choose a traditional stanza, even what I alter must seem traditional. I commit my emotion to shepherds, herdsmen, camel-drivers, learned men; Milton’s or Shelley’s Platonist, that Tower Palmer drew. (E&I 522)

Subjectivity or personal outpour as the essence of literature, found re-assertion once again in his essay *The General Introduction for My Work* written two years before his death, wherein he recorded: *A poet writes always of his personal life, in his finest work out of his tragedy, whatever it be, lost love, or mere loneliness* (E&I 509). Re-iterating his initial belief in the theory of *Art for Art sake*, Yeats envisages poetry as a medium capable of providing a flight from the fret and fume of life. He also advocated and practiced writing of passionate poetry to provide an antidote to the gravest danger facing the tragic generation by means of an external validation of imaginative experience (Vlasopoles 151). With a desire to imbibe in literature those feelings which could arouse a passionate response from the audience, he proposed thus: *We wish to make our work a mirror; where the passions and desires and ideals of our own minds can cast terrible or beautiful images* (UP I 422). Moreover, Yeats felt that the feelings expressed in literature should not be a product of
over-intellectualized angst, but universal and realistic emotions common to humanity. Yeats’s philosophical belief about repressed passions and desires which manifested in his dreams and visions finds expression in his assertion:

The passions, when we know they cannot find fulfilment, become vision and a vision, whether we wake or sleep, prolongs its power by rhythm and pattern. (My 341)

Vlasopolos also feels that Yeats’s passion allows him subjectivity without solipsism especially since passionate genres like folk-art validate the poet’s vision by giving it the resonance of ancient myth and simplicity of language. Yeats’s search for unity of culture because of its dependence upon a system outside the psyche to sustain it represents his greatest departure from the humanism of the Romantics (Vlasopoles 23-24). Moreover, although Yeats promoted personal sentiments in poetry, he advocated the Arnoldian concept of objectivity in the aesthetical appreciation of a work of art. For instance, in the essay The Death of Synge, Yeats states that the act of appreciation of any great thing is an act of self-conquest (CW III 381). Though he seemed to be vehemently suggesting surrender of the self to appreciate art, he himself practised subjective evaluation in his critical observations about his contemporaries and literature in general. Yeats’s concept of literature also entailed yoking together of rather disparate entities enumerated as his chief interests in Explorations. He says:

I had three interests: interest in a form of literature, in a form of philosophy and a belief in nationality. None of these seemed to have anything to do with the other, but gradually my love of literature and my belief in nationality came together. (263)

Although emphasizing the need for literature to be rooted in the native soil, Yeats did not advocate using it for political polemics. His ideology, in this regard, was opposed to that of Dowden who believed that locating or confining literature to a particular nationality or period would adversely affect the scope of literature. In fact, Yeats yoked together his love for literature with his belief in nationality to write some of the best poetry. Moreover, he categorically disassociated literature from journalism on the basis of the personal element. It was primarily the consciousness of the predominance of subjective and imaginative element in literature, an essentially Romantic feature that Yeats believed distinguished literature from journalism. He asserted: Literature is not journalism because it can turn the imagination to whatever is essential and unchanging in life (CW, III 51). Similarly, literature and scientific
language were two disparate entities for Yeats. In his essay "Moods," Yeats differentiated between the two thus:

"Literature differs from explanatory and scientific writing in being wrought about a mood, or a community of moods, as the body is wrought about an invisible soul; and if it uses argument, theory, erudition, observation, and seems to grow hot in assertion or in denial, it does so merely to make us partakers at the banquets of the moods." (E&I 195)

Affirming that literature was a product of the intricacies of a writer's psyche, who withstood pressures to formulate his ideas into concrete, Yeats was also conscious how these affected the final product of literature and art. He recognized the endeavour that went into creation of all literary forms - poetry, novel, play, and also other art forms such as painting, sculpture or music. He was also aware that the chasm between the effort and the result of the effort could not be filled and that ironically, the endeavour had to be shrouded to give the semblance of effortless naturalism. A work must appear a result of an inborn creative talent of the artist, and hence seem an moment's thought. Yeats also realized that any curtailment in sincere effort on the part of the writer would also mean destruction of creative tensions which produced great literature. In other words, he was conscious that without intensity, without effort and without toil, no creativity especially in literature was feasible.

Following pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus' dictum: "War (that is conflict between the opposites) is the father of all and king of all" (Atkins 2), Yeats passionately believed in the indispensability of opposites in literature. He perceived of conflict as fundamental to literature. This belief in the validity of opposites was confirmed by his assertions in two of his letters wherein, he writes: "To me all things are made up of the conflict of two states of consciousness" (L 917) and "I see things double, doubled in history, world history, personal history" (887). His philosophy was also influenced by Nietzsche who gave him the oxymoronic concept of "Tragic Joy." His preoccupation with opposites in literature is apparent from many of the titles of his collections such as "The Tower" and "The Winding Stairs," poems like "Woman Young and Old," "man Young and Old," two mutually opposing titles for two poems at the beginning of Yeats' first volume Crossways, or within a single title such as "Dialogue of Self and Soul," "He and She" and "The Man and the Echo." For Yeats, contraries also signified progression in Blakean terms which he subtly exemplified in terms of what Mikhail Baktin calls "Dialogic imagination." Baktin had
perceived humanity as defined by its unfinalisedness. He asserted that nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world; the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken (qtd. in Alkins 5). Correspondingly, Yeats argued: Human life is a preparation for something that never happens (Au 106). Concomitantly, Yeats presumed conflict to be indispensable to artistic creation. In the Trembling of the Veil, Yeats affirmed that creation entailed conflict, whether with our own mind or with that of others. Reiterating conflict as fundamental to literature in Synge and the Ireland of His Times, he observes:

I think that all noble things are the result of warfare; great nations and classes, of warfare in the visible world, great poetry and philosophy, of invisible warfare, the division of a mind within itself, a victory, the sacrifice of a man to himself. (E&I 321)

Thus Yeats was certain that literature in general and specifically, poetry implied a pre-existent conflict. In fact, for Yeats, poetry was not merely the linear expression of a mood either of despondency, despair or excitement; it was the consciousness of the conflict within. This notion of poetry could be extended to evoke similar realization of the variance which Yeats manifested as the contest between the self and the anti-self through the deft use of masks in his own literary oeuvre.

Literature, as per Yeats, is built upon the edifice of beauty and truth. In his search for these two essential elements of literature, Yeats was inspired by diverse schools of thought and art especially Symbolism, German Expressionism, and French Surrealism. Initially, Yeats had also associated himself with a group of writers The Decadents who professed the doctrine of Art for Art sake. The group comprising Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson and Arthur Symons regarded making beautiful things, the sole motive of literature and especially poetry. They were unmindful of their own prejudiced and biased contention against the contemporary morality. Concurring with the Decadents, Yeats posited: In literature, nothing that is not beautiful has any right to exist (L 31). His alliance with the Romantics further transformed his notion of truth and beauty. With his evolution as a critic, unlike Coleridge, Wordsworth and the writers of the Tragic Generation, Yeats came to regard the imaginative pursuit of only beauty as futile for he realized that it could plunge one into an over-idealized, self-absorbed world that isolates you from humanity (Vlasopolos 23).
Besides, much of Yeats's perception of aestheticism in literature was inspired by Oscar Wilde's concept of beauty and its role in the modern society. Yeats especially alluded to a lecture delivered in 1883, wherein Wilde claimed:

> I do not desire to give you any abstract definition of beauty at all. For we, working in art cannot accept any theory of beauty in exchange for beauty itself; and so far from desiring to isolate it in a formula appealing to the intellect, we, on the contrary, seek to materialize it in a form that gives joy to the soul through the senses. We want to create it, not to define it. The definition should follow the work: the work should not adapt itself to the definition. (Wilde 98)

Within his poetics, Yeats also revealed an almost religious attitude towards literature. In fact, for him, art was a religious surrogate. A visionary like Blake, Yeats too believed imaginative arts to be God's benevolence showered on a chosen few and was convinced that those who made their souls by hearing sermons now did so by reading imaginative literature. He used the term religion not in the sense of Catholic or Protestant religion, but rather in the sense in which he credited Blake for whom imagination was the first emanation of Divinity, the body of God and who proclaimed the religion of art (E&I 112). He further deduced:

> é the imaginative arts were therefore the greatest of Divine revelations, and that the sympathy with all living things, sinful and righteous alike, which the imaginative arts awaken, is that forgiveness of sins commanded by Christ. (112)

A perusal of Yeats's concept of religion and mysticism is also significant to understand his notion of literature and creativity. What led him to invent his own set of beliefs was his total rejection of the popular religion which to him was redundant, unscientific and obsolete. As a substitute, he created his own system, based mainly on occult, magic, astronomy and necromantic theosophy. In his essay Magic, he made certain astounding observations:

1. That the borders of our mind are ever shifting, and that many minds can flow into one another, as it were, and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy.
2. That the borders of our memories are as shifting, and that our memories are a part of one great memory, the memory of Nature itself.
3. That this great mind and great memory can be evoked by symbols. (E&I 28)
These tenets helped Yeats to perceive the creative process in terms of a mystic experience which he related to his own philosophic concepts such as the Anima Mundi and Spiritus Mundi. Yeats also identified the artist’s vision with religious faith and reposed his conviction in creation rather than the creator. He records in a letter: "All our art is but the putting our faith and the evidence of our faith into words or forms and our faith is in ecstasy." (L 583). Characteristically, according to an anonymous comment, Yeats’ religious attitude, towards literature never treated a work of art in the distinctively literary way, but as the speech and embodiment of forces that are, and have been spiritually at work in the world (qtd. in Pierce, I 220). Intrinsically related to this belief was his assertion that the function of art is the invocation of spiritual influences in the world. This, in turn, led him to denounce realism in literature. He also differentiated between an imaginative writer and a saint on the premise that the former seeks an eternal art (E&I 286) while the latter seeks his own eternity (My 256). His rejection of realism also made him find faults with the modern literature which he found monotonous in its structure and effeminate in its continual insistence upon certain moments of strained lyricism (Ex 220). Edna Longley uses H. T. Kirby Smith’s summation of Yeats’s Wasteland as the disruptions, juxtapositions, wrenching of metre, sudden restorations of regularity, breaks, shifts, traditions, and modulations that Eliot and Pound accompanied in what became virtually a joint enterprise to underscore Yeats’ similar stance towards modern literature (qtd. in Longley 50).

Within Yeats’ critical schema, since tradition and personality emerged as inseparables, he lamented the breaking free from tradition by the modernists. These two entities were also offered as the artist’s ark against the deluge of incoherence, vulgarity and triviality that is the modern world (Sena 156). Although Eliot regarded Yeats as the mediator of tradition, Yeats’ concept of tradition differed from that of the Modernists. For Yeats, the perfection of personality in literature (CW IV 186) was equally important. Eliot, on the other hand, talked not of the expression of personality but an escape from personality. Also while Eliot was certain: Tradition cannot be inherited; you have to obtain it with great labour (SE 4), Yeats perceived of tradition in terms of nationality. To him, the poets related to tradition were organic. He compared them to unbroken thread or an old and broken stem with a newly grafted rose. In Poetry and Tradition, Yeats recalls his original creative impulse in literature as akin to forging a new sword on our old traditional anvil for that great battle that must in the end re-establish the old, confident, joyous world (CW IV 182). In this context, Edna Longley in her book Yeats and Modern
Poetry asserts that when both Yeats and Eliot invoke tradition, both exemplify survival or revival in modern poetry of one of the principal Romantic modalities for re-enchanting the world: the return to religious tradition, sometimes with mystical elements (Longley 47).

Writing under the influence of the Romantics, Yeats echoed their concerns and subjects in his works and critical writings. Thus vision and prophesy; primitive myths and legends; heightened imagination and passionate expression, masks and its anti-thesis, the anti-self; and the notion of Anima Mundi - the universal mind appears in his writings in an endeavour to persistently seek patterns of experience and images. In The Romantic Survival (1957), John Bayley surveys Yeats’ career to establish his dealings with his Romantic inheritance. Like the Romantics, Yeats placed the self at the centre of his work. Bayley further asserts: Yeats is certainly the last Romantic to believe implicitly in the power of Poetry (54) and applauds Yeats for balancing restraint and passionate assertion in the development of his style. Yeats, nevertheless, also tried hard to incorporate Modernism into Romanticism, driven as he was by an urge to imbibe contemporary trends and preferences in literature into his own craft. Moreover, for Yeats, Romanticism was confined neither to a few men like Coleridge, Blake, Shelley, Keats or Byron nor to a specific historical period. It was an ideology based on certain qualities assimilated over the ages which reached its zenith in the present times. He declared: The movement most characteristic of the literature and art and to some extent of the thoughts, too, of our century has been romanticism (LNI 108). True to the Romantic spirit, Yeats was open-minded about accepting influences from tradition as part of the main stream thoughts. Recording his views about this aspect, he wrote to T. Sturge Moore:

I feel that an imaginative writer whose work draws him to philosophy must attach himself to some great historic school. My dreams and much psychic phenomena force me into a certain little trodden way but I must not go too far from the main European track. (L 149)

Yeats’ preoccupations with earlier tradition converged with his imagination to formulate his late-Romantic thought. For him, the literary imagination was inseparably connected with history. In fact, like Blake, he regarded it indistinguishable from the past. In A General Introduction for My Work, Yeats, like Eliot, Frye and Bloom, recorded that works of art are always begotten by previous works of art (E&I 352). Categorically, dismissing originality and reposing his faith in tradition, he also comments: Talk to me of
originality and I will turn on you with rage (E&I 522) and further states: ëI could not break from tradition without ëbreaking from some part of my own natureë, I have met with ancient myths in my dreams, brightly lit; and I think it allied to the wisdom or instinct that guides a migratory bird (E&I viii).

Desirous of reviving and re-vitalizing the oral Gaelic traditions and the Irish folklores, Yeats lamented the loss of past glory and beauty with the advent of modernism in literature. Referring to the 18th century Ireland, a time before secular religion and political feuding divided the people in Ireland in his poems ëThe Gyresë he plainly stated: ëA greater, a more gracious time has gone (Ex 337). Similarly in 1930, he recorded in his diary that his expression was most profound and ideal, when he carried with him ëthe greatest possible amount of hereditary thought and feeling (Ex 293).

For Yeats, the past was most befittingly and appropriately represented by his Romantic heritage, the occult tradition which he greatly admired, and the perennial philosophy of Plato, Plotinus, Socrates and their heirs. Of all the world literature, he found an intense correspondence between the Irish literature and the Greek Drama which he believed was the only literature to have ëachieved perfectionë. Concomitantly, Yeats also lamented the passing away of the great heroic age of Homer in the final stanza of ëCoole Park and Ballylee, 1931ë which begins with ëWe were the last Romantics and ends with:

But all is changed, that high horse riderless
Though mounted in that saddle Homer rode
Where the Swan drifts upon a darkling floor. (SP 150)

A sense of loss and grieving at the passing away of the magnificence of the heroic age is prominently visible in Yeatsës writings. Moreover, his poetics displays his loathing at the destruction caused by change, especially that of the ëthe woods of Arcady,ë and ëtheir antiquated joyë (VP 64). He also lamented the resultant compulsion for man to only dream of those times, thereby expressing his Romantic yearning for the bygone period of valour and heroism. Patrick Keane regards Yeatsës interaction with tradition in the light of the fact that Yeatsës Romanticism is a kind of multicultural tradition of its own. He points out: ëYeatsian Romanticism became increasingly antithetical, a life-affirming vitalism opposed, in Yeatsës dialectical quarrel with himself, to primary religious transcendence (qtd. in Bell 6). He further posits:
Like many European Romantics before him and some myth-centred primordialists after him, Yeats intends to adopt a conservative, aristocratic, even reactionary form of irrationalism, looking back with nostalgia towards some golden, organic, pre-scientific age of faith or myth; to a dark backward and abyss of time when dryads haunted the forest boughs, before new philosophy called all in doubt, before thought had been mechanized by the philosophies, and life itself mechanized by industrialism; before Newton had analytically unravelled the beauty of the rainbow, before Locke had disassociated sensibility and fractured concrete reality itself by severing primary from secondary sense-qualities. (Keane 141)

Thus apart from envisaging an unremitting connection of literature in general with the past traditions, Yeats also forged the inextricable interlacing of his esoteric studies and literary theory with its interdependence on imagination. In his theory of art, imagination emerged as the bridge between what appeared to be two extremes, the idealist notion of the great mind and the memory, and the material actuality of life. Ardently hoping for passing of the age of criticism and return of an age of imagination, of emotion, of moods, of revelation, about to come in its place (E&I 197), Yeats, nevertheless never relinquished his Romantic conviction of the return of the age of criticism. At the same time, he was also aware that the new age of imagination would be unlike the erstwhile Romantic age as represented by Spenser, Blake or Shelley. Yeats depicted this duality of thought in a debate in a poem entitled Ego Dominus Tuus wherein Ille and Hic present the two contrasting viewpoints. Ille, Yeats’s spokesperson, seeks an image and is certain that Art is but a vision of reality, while Hic disagrees and adamantly declares: I would find myself not an image to which Ille replies: This is our modern hope. We are but critics, or but half create (SP 77). In this context, Krans illustrates further that for Yeats:

the function of art being the invocation of spiritual influences upon the world, it follows that only such and so much material should be used by art as serves that end. In other words, realism must be utterly banished, and no place left for the mimetic, for natural description for the sake of description, for anecdote for the sake of anecdote, or for scientific opinion on its own account. The business of art, in short, is not with thought and criticism, but revelation and invocation. (qtd. in Pierce I 222)
Celebrating the pan psychic power of imagination, Yeats perceived it as opposed to abstract reasoning, which he detested, mainly because he found it divorced from imagination and the natural world. He deemed imagination capable of revealing the inner truths and intuitive meanings underlying our everyday experiences. The pursuit of unorthodox forms of knowledge not only satiated Yeats’s curiosity but also fed his imagination with copious ideas and images. Yeats subtly fused together his imaginary and visionary perception with realistic details in literature and criticism. Like William Blake, he also regarded imagination to be the source of all human thought, endeavour and action. Thus emulating the Romantics, he idealized Romantic imagination which, he believed, had the ability to transcend present reality. In The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry, he wrote:

I have observed dreams and visions very carefully, and am now certain that the imagination has some way of lighting on the truth that the reason has not, and that its commandments, delivered when the body is still and the reason silent, are the most binding we can ever know. (E&I 65)

In fact, in his search for a coherent, personal metaphysics, Yeats reiterated the need for formulation of a philosophy which could give free play to imagination.

I wished for a system of thoughts that could leave my imagination free to create as it chose and yet make all that it created, or could create, part of the one history, and that of the souls. (AV xi)

Thus a romantic at heart, Yeats envisioned imagination to have the potential to transform and to elevate life and to make it worthy of art. Conversely, he also assumed that the purpose of art was to ennoble life. In his critical essay on Blake, Yeats affirmed imagination as the liberating force of the human spirit, a force which could rescue it from the shackles of reality. Thus imagination, to him, was an intangible link between the immortal world and man and manifested most prominently in the form of Symbols which unfolded in moments of trance, exaltation or deep meditation.

It was around 1903 that Yeats began to reformulate his critical theory and poetics. He repudiated the poetic theory of the Rhymers who believed that poetry is an end in itself; it has nothing to do with thought, nothing to do with philosophy, nothing to do with life, nothing to do with anything but the music of cadence, and beauty of phrase (UP I 248). The shift from the theory of Art for Art sake to Art for Life sake theory purged his poetics
and works of ornamentation, and inspired him to reconcile the personal and the subjective with the objective for a greater universal appeal. It not only stimulated him to refine his own craft, making it more concrete and masculine, but also inspired him to influence others especially Ezra Pound. Consequently, the earlier concentration on folklores, myths and legends of Ireland gave way to the experience and expression of the modern concrete reality with the professed aim to lay bare the truth behind the actuality, although he soon found the superficiality of modernity rather disturbing and discouraging. Nevertheless, a corresponding change was also discernible in his critical works, which gained greater impetus with Yeats’s growing erudition and evolution as a critic and artist, and his father’s constant interaction with him on art and literature. In his regular correspondence with his son, Yeats’s father, apart from correcting and challenging him, also provided concerted and concrete inputs on issues such as the fundamental values of intellectual energy, strenuous devotion to truth and a widely sympathetic sense of humanity. Yeats’s analogous attitude towards literature is aptly reflected in a letter written to his father wherein, he posits:

é all our art is but the putting on faithé into words or forms and our faith is in ecstasyé, meaning by vision the intense realization of a state of ecstatic emotion symbolized in a definite imagined region. I have tried for more self-portraiture. (L 583)

Recognizing art as indispensible to life, Yeats found a definite analogy between art and literature. He linked these two persistently into a web of associations, thereby blending visual art and literature. His preoccupation with the visual art underscored his aesthetics and poetics. He anticipated the modernist approach which embodied a growing inclination towards culture of images and the prominence of the correlation between literature and visual arts. In the introduction to Essays and Introductions, Yeats has pointed out the poet’s task as procedurally analogous to the painters:

I would have all the arts drawn together, recover their ancient association, the painter painting what the poet has written, the musician setting the poet’s words to simple airs, that the houseman and the engine Í driver may sing them to their work. (E&I ix)

Re-integration of other art forms with literature had been an ambition for Yeats. This quest was also integral to his lifelong desire to achieve unity which in turn was a driving force behind his critical canon and his works. Hazard Adams also feels that man achieves
the greatest imaginative vision when he finally apprehends unity by seeing that all things are analogies of all other things (Adams 4-5). In keeping with his vision to unite art and literature, in his essay ŒArt and Ideas,Œ Yeats rallies against the modernist efforts as disintegrating arts:

Nor had we better warrant to separate one art from another, for there has been no age before our own wherein the arts have been other than a single authority, a Holy Church of Romance. (E&I 353)

With this also came the realization that ŒAestheticism had Œ helped bring about the very fragmentation that Yeats, with his desires for unity of thoughts and a popular theatre, had been struggling against (Loizeaux 123). Yeats gave a clarion call to recover this lost integration in his essay ŒArt and IdeasŒ:

Shall we rid of the pride of intellect, of sedentary meditation, of emotion that leaves us when the book is closed or the picture seen no more; and live amid the thoughts that can go with us by steamboat and railway as once upon horseback, or camel-back, rediscovering, by our reintegration of the mind, our more profound Pre-Raphaelitism, the old abounding, nonchalant reverie? (E&I 355)

A votary of Œdirectness and simplicityŒ in literature, Yeats advocated sincerity and unaffectedness of thought and expression in colloquial language, as in a letter to an intimate friend. He recommended discreet, unambiguous style, free from abstractions and contrived expressions. For this very reason, he preferred folklores for he found them to be Œfull of simplicity and musical occurrences, for they are the literature of a class for whom every incident in the old rut of birth, love, pain, and death has cropped up unchanged for centuries: who have steeped everything in the heart: to whom everything is a symbolŒ (Yeats, Fairy 5). Though Yeats avowed to support simplicity, concreteness and straightforwardness in literature, the various theoretical issues raised by the interconnections, he weaved between life and art, literature and visual art, occult and art, nationality and literature plagued his own craft.

A self-critic, Yeats was aware of his own flair for abstractions and made persistent efforts to purge his mind of them, leaving it free to write intangibly and lucidly. Yeats took concentrated measures to break free from such distractions by focusing on ŒpictureŒ as correlative to abstraction and by linking his poetic theory with visual arts. For this purpose,
he chose pictures of the Pre-Raphaelites as subjects of his poetry, assessing the works of the renowned painters, and sculptors of the movement, thereby substantiating his literary theories with examples to overcome vagueness. Comprehending that generalization about life and art results in poor literature in general and poetry in particular, he confuted abstractions yet he found it rather difficult to overcome indistinct notions and dreamy constructs. In fact, his detractors indict him for being slipshod and vague in his dramatic and prosodic attempts. Hence there is a tacit scepticism about the genuineness of his observation that art "shrinks" from every abstract thing, from all that is of the brain only, from all that is not a fountain jetting from the entire hopes, memories, and sensations of the body. Its morality is personal, knows little of any general law (E&I 292).

To counter abstraction and vagueness, Yeats recommends the notion of "poetry as vision" wherein visions refer to the perceptions of the minds’ eye rather than the corporeal eye and is identified as the source and the objective of poems. His concept of vision had its roots in the day-dreaming moments of his childhood when his vivid imagination could arouse many mental visions which he continued to explore further and invoke through his occult studies. For him, the precedence had been set by Blake’s use of visions in his poetry and paintings. He quoted Blake to substantiate his claim on the vitality of visions as a source of intellectual inspiration: "I am really drunk with the intellectual vision whenever I take a pencil or graver into my hand" (E&I 119). Through his accounts, it is apparent that he was certain that visions could provide sources for poetry and plays. He even claimed to have envisioned the last part of The Wandering of Oisin, conceived the plot of The Shadowy Waters out of certain visionary experiences, and visualized Cathleen ni Houlihan in a dream as distinct as a vision (VP I 232).

Intrinsically related to Yeats’ idea of vitality of imagination was the indispensability of images not merely as recurring symbols in literature but also as crucial to the entire metaphysical system and critical theory which he sought to formulate. Images, being inherently suggestive, gratified Yeats’ desire and also hinted at the indelible influence of the Pre-Raphaelites, the Symbolists and the Mystics on his psyche. Images also gathered significance in Yeats’ philosophy because with their help, he tried to yoke together art, religion and metaphysics. His theory of art was also closely related to his idea of symbolism as he believed in the extensive use of symbols. In his essay "The Symbolism of Poetry," Yeats conclusively declared "the continuous indefinable symbolism to be the substance of
all style (E&I 155). He believed the symbols to have the power to evoke the world beyond
the senses and to reveal the inner recesses of rhythm and patterns which distinguish one
component from the other. When subtly used the symbols said things which could not be
said so perfectly in any other way (E&I 147). For this very reason, Yeats felt: It is not
possible to separate an emotion or a spiritual state from the image that calls it up and gives it
expression (286). For him, it was a façade which allowed the artist to say several things,
open to multiple interpretations.

Thus for Yeats, symbols were blossoms, as it were, growing from invisible immortal
roots, hands, as it were, pointing the way into some divine labyrinth (E&I 117). Emphasizing the importance of Symbolism in his own craft, in a letter to Katherine Tynan, he
conceded: In the second part of Oisin under the disguise of symbolism, I have said several
things to which I only have the key. The romance is for my readers. They must not know
there is a symbol anywhere. They will not find out. If they did, it will spoil the art, yet the
whole poem is full of symbols - if it be full of aught but clouds (L 88). As is usual with
Yeats, he contradicted himself soon after the publication of Oisin, when he agreed that Oisin
needed an interpreter. Yeats use of symbols was, indeed, evasive. Ellmann quotes Yeats
confession to a friend, wherein Yeats conceded that he always speaks figuratively, and can
never express himself literally; but that when he is older he hopes to think and say the
thought itself as it really is (Ellmann, Mask 56). His essay The Symbolism of Poetry (1900)
thus unequivocally elucidates the indispensability of symbols and suggestive imagery
to the contemporary philosophy of art and literature. In this context, he posits:

The scientific movement brought with it a literature which was always tending to lose
itself in externalities of all kinds, in opinion, in declamation, in picturesque writing, in
word-painting, or in what Mr. Symons has called an attempt to build in brick and
mortar inside the covers of a book; and now writers have begun to dwell upon the
element of evocation, of suggestion, upon what we call the symbolism in great
writers. (E&I 155)

Sourcing his own symbols from the medieval literature, in a letter to Ernest Boyd,
Yeats accepts: My interest in mystic symbolism did not come from Arthur Symons or any
other contemporary writer. I have been a student of the medieval mystics since 1817 and
found in such authors as Valentin Andrea authority for my use of the rose. My chief mystic
authorities have been Boehme, Blake and Swedenborg. Of the French Symbolists, I have never had any detailed or accurate knowledge (L 592).

Yeats’ theory and practice of Symbolism also drew from William Blake, Shelley, Irish Mythology, Magic and mystic writers. Like Blake, he also believed that symbols had the power to evoke the world beyond the senses and to alter the substance, form and style of literature and art. Yeats was certain that symbols transcended time and place and could manifest themselves in external objects, scenes and images as conceived by the artist and could express the profoundest internal state of mind and also the eternal truths of life.

During the course of his theosophical studies and his formulation of a systematic theory, Yeats came across the concept of Anima Mundi, often referred to as the collective unconscious memory or the soul of the world. This concept which soon became fundamental to his metaphysical thought has often been compared and regarded parallel to Jung’s concept of Collective Unconsciousness. However, the latter differs from Yeats’ model in that Jung’s unconscious is a psychic reality and has no existence independent of Human psyche (Prasad 99). On the other hand, Yeats’ Anima Mundi is an ever extending dynamic entity fed by the collective memory of humanity at large. Yeats’ concept of Anima Mundi which is a take from Platonic concept also finds its equivalent in Spenser’s Garden of Adones, Blake’s Los and Shelley’s Intellectual Beauty. In Mythology, Yeats avers: We carry to Anima Mundi, our memory (My 354). Thus for him, Anima Mundi is the repository of archetypal images and emotions from which the artists and the musicians draw their symbols and images to suit their muse. His belief in the duality of human mind - its logical distinctive entity of its own and yet being a part of the larger universal mind - was developed during his Blake studies. A pantheist and a metaphysical idealist, Yeats perceived of this universal mind as the mind of God. Seemingly transposable with Anima Mundi is the Spiritus Mundi (world spirit) which Yeats has defined as a general store-house of images which have ceased to be a property of any personality or spirit (VP 822).

The concept of Anima Mundi is most profoundly explained in Per Amica Silentia Lunae, its epigraph, a poem entitled Ego Dominus Tuus and in the 1925 edition of A Vision wherein he defined it as receptacle of emotional images when purified from whatever unites them to one man rather than to another (AV 176). Even in his Autobiographies, he exults in the discovery of certain archetype images and concedes of coming face to face with the Anima Mundi described by Platonic philosophers and more especially in modern times by
Henry More, which has a memory independent of embodied individual memories, though they constantly enrich it with their images and thoughts (210).

According to Yeats, Anima Mundi is invoked only when one suspends the critical faculty and also desire and one keeps body still and (their) minds awake and clear (My 344). It is also manifested in a state of trance or sleep and needs one to refrain from being too critical. Yeats asserts: One must allow images to form with all their association before one criticizes (344). About his own craft, Yeats avers, I have discovered, by passing into a slight trance, images pass rapidly before you. If you can suspend also desire and let them form at their own will, your absorption becomes more clear in colour, more precise in articulation, and you and they begin to move in the midst of what seems a powerful light (344). Traces of this notion of a general shared store-house of images are discernible in some of his poems such as Before the World was Made, Crazy Jane on God, Paudeen, Under Ben Bulben and also the Cuchulain plays. In The Second Coming, Yeats refers to the apocalyptic sphynx as vast image out of Spiritus Mundi (SP 100). Similarly, he alludes to Anima Mundi in The Tower where he recalls:

Certain men-at-arms there were
Whose image, in the Great memory stored,
Come with loud cry and panting breast
To break upon a sleeper’s rest
While their great wooden dice beat on the board. (SP 108)

Correspondingly, Yeats like many others of the age of genesis of modern psychological awareness and the idea of sub conscious, had been fascinated by the concept of a divided self which he expounded in terms of an anti-self and a self, veneered by a mask or pose. His fascination with masks as a concept had begun in his youth when he saw the members of the Séance donning them during the initiation ceremony of The Golden Dawn. Yeats explored the possibilities of the Mask as a concept in literary theory and developed it primarily in Estrangement, Per Amica Silentia Lunae and the Essays on Synge, wherein he used it as a poetic device, as part of psychological defence mechanism to buffer his self-image. His critical theory, surely guided by his unflinching belief in the realm of unconscious and the world of instinct, made use of the metaphor of the mask to portray the dichotomy of man. He conceptualized the mask as the alter ego - the heroic ideal which acted both as a
metaphor for the internal struggle, and as a protective shield in literature. Yeats agreed with his father's view that the capacity of a literary figure to meet the opposite self-formed the basis of excellence in poetry and art. In The Death of Synge, Yeats says:

I think that all happiness depends on the energy to assume the mask of some other self; that all joyous or creative life is a re-birth as something not oneself, something which has no memory and is created in a moment and perpetually renewed. We put on a grotesque or solemn painted face to hide us from the terrors of judgment, invent an imaginative saturnalia where one forgets reality, a game like that of a child, where one loses the infinite pain of self-realisation. Perhaps all the sins and energies of the world are but its flight from an infinite blinding beam. (Au 306)

As opposed to the Romantics for whom art remained an expression of personal emotions, Yeats' theory of Masks proposed the argument that often the artist created the opposite of his own personal self in life, and that it is the tension between the man and the mask which creates commendable literature and art. Yeats' doctrine was also opposed to that of T. S. Eliot's assertion in Tradition and Individual Talent that the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates (SW 54). For Yeats, however, these two were inseparable.

Yeats' mask was also distinguishable from the repressed unconscious and unwelcome self, the shadow of C. G. Jung's analytical psychology. Yeats applied this theory on his contemporaries especially in the evaluation of the literary works of the Tragic Generation—a phrase coined by him to refer to a disparate group of writers that includes Lionel Johnson, Oscar Wilde, W. E. Henley, Ernest Dowson and John Davidson. He was certain that the Rhymers failed mainly because they were unable to wear the masks of other people and characters. Thus Yeats considered mask essential for artistic creativity. The mask being an artifice, and deliberately worn, Yeats presumed it independent of Anima Mundi as it did not have any history or memory.

Perceiving the mask as a bridge between the artist and the impersonal experience, he further contended that the mask had the potential to help the artist to minimize his own personality, and present the opposite feelings contrary to his personal self. To elucidate his stance, Yeats gave examples of some of the eminent literary persons whose artistic aura differed from their real life character. Thus though William Morris was a boisterous and
happy man, he often depicted ‘dim colours and pensive moods’ in his works (My 328) while Walter Savage, a calm artist was prone to violent rage in real life. Yeats defined the soul or the mind of the creative individual by means of anti-self and mask theory in Anima Hominis as well. He focused on the artistic creativity as an outcome of the tension between the self and anti-self. He says: ‘We make out of the quarrel with others rhetoric, but out of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry’ (331). He asserts that his over bearing anti-self comes to those whose passion is reality and thus to the poets only and not to practical men who believe in money or deceiving others (331). However, Yeats contradicts this contention in the first section of The Trembling of the Veil:

My mind began drifting vaguely towards the doctrine of the ‘mask’ which has convinced me that every passionate man (I have nothing to do with mechanist or philanthropist, or man whose eyes have no preference) is, as it were linked with another age, historical or imaginary where alone he finds images that arouse his energy. (Au 93)

Yeats elucidates it further with an example of Napoleon whom he believed had ‘Roman Emperor’s image in his head and some condottiere’s blood in his heart’ (93). Yeats extends his doctrine to include nationalist literature as well. He believed that often the art of the celebrated artists does not adhere to what the nation wants. Yeats quotes the instance of the breach between the religious and moral 18th century Scotland and the genius of Burns which celebrated ‘lust and drink and drunken gaiety. In the same way, he found the demeanour of Synge opposite of what Ireland wanted. Thus, Yeats perceived of mask as a two edged tool which could be used variously to hide the reality or to reveal it. Dithering between choosing the mask that hides and the mask that reveals, Yeats also concedes:

é as I look backward upon my own writing, I take pleasure alone in those verses where it seems to me I have found something hard and cold, some articulation of the image which is the opposite of all that I am in my daily life, and all that my country isé. (CW III 218)

On another plain, for Yeats, the theory of the mask evoked self-transformation though imitation. A. Norman Jeffares feels that Yeats’ theory of the mask is based upon antithesis in character, upon the differences between a natural and a chosen personality, upon contrariety (Jeffares 42). He further adds that in poetic drama the true identity of a character
is aroused in the character and in the audience through the deliberate creation of a great mask, not on the passive nature of contemporary culture or on self-realization (Jeffares 42). At times, Yeats also implies that the mask is a deliberate, artificial façade- a product of the conscious will to escape from the mundane monotony of life and the middle class values which Yeats detested in literature. In his diary, he wrote in 1909:

Style, personality - deliberately adopted and therefore a mask - is the only escape from the hot-faced bargainers, money-changers. (Au 279)

For Yeats, the mask was also a means to accomplish his aspiration for a mysterious art which he desired to popularize. Harold Bloom regards the doctrine of mask as Yeats' highly individual contribution to the Romantic sublime while John Unterecker avers that Reality for Yeats, is neither to be found in that buried self which directs and orders a man's life nor in a Mask, the anti-self, but in the product, born of their struggle (Unterecker 30).

The synthesis of self and its antithetical mask emerged in Yeats' poetics as the concept of ÆPersona or a recreated poetic self. Yeats' use of the term ÆPersona was also ambiguous, for it differed from its Latin meaning and thus was open to various interpretations. In the ÆIrish Dramatic Movement, it emerged in the sense of a fictional character called the dramatic persona - a character created by the artist and distinguished from his own self. Yeats described this meaning in an article on Browning, wherein he argued that it was indeed hard to say when Browning was speaking in his poems or when it was one of his dramatic personas. In this sense, he used the term to differentiate between the created character and the creating artist himself. True to his contradictory assertions, Yeats presented an unusual construal to the term ÆPersona in a later essay titled ÆM. Synge and the Ireland of his Times where it refers to the artistic self: Misfortune shook his physical nature while it left his intellect and his moral nature untroubled. The external self, the Mask, the persona, was a shadow; character was all (E&I 330). Here, he associated persona with the mask and the physical body of the man. A clue to Yeats' meaning in using persona in this context may be found in A Vision and the essay ÆSwedenborg, Mediums, and the Desolate Places in which Yeats discussed the persona as antithetical to the waking mind.

Commenting on Drama as a significant genre of literature, Yeats displayed his personal contrived exclusiveness and elusiveness as a drama critic. Decisively analyzing and
writing ardently on drama, and its essential mechanism, Yeats initiated experimentation, and suggested ways to improve the genre, and to allure public into theatres. He analyzed realistic drama written by Shaw, Ibsen and Beckett, and found fault with their overemphasis on reality. His iconic observations and submissions to revamp theatre were greatly inspired by The Noh Drama. He was driven by the conviction that poetry, acting, dialogues and the plot must be in unison, one complementing the other to make drama effective and popular. However, his mythological and esoteric references, impossible demands on actors and audience alike and remoteness from ordinary life and everyday concerns made him rather unpopular as a dramatist and drama critic. Since Yeats's critical notions of drama will be taken up in chapter five separately, they are not being dealt with here in detail.

Concomitantly, Yeats's concept of criticism was not confined merely to the varied genres of literature but extended beyond it to include all art forms primarily to establish a connection between art and literature. His assertion that art should reflect the personality of its creator, so that it became difficult to differentiate between the artist and his art was all-pervasive which included the relationship between the litterateur and literature too. Yeats also did not reach any finality regarding the predominance of subject over pattern or vice versa. He left the issue open-ended. In fact, he clearly voiced his concern at the existing dissonance and lack of integration and the necessity of forging unity between form and content in literature and art. He endorsed Arthur Hallam's opinion that "whatever is mixed with art and appears under its semblance is always favourably regarded than art free and unalloyed" (CW IX 202).

Thus Yeats favoured the depiction of universality of the feelings despite his insistence on literature being primarily the personal outpour of emotions and feelings. His father John Butler Yeats's view: "Art lifts us out of the sphere of mere bestiality, art is a musician and touches every chord in the human harp- in other words, a single feeling becomes a mood, and the artist is a man with a natural tendency to thus convert every single feeling to a mood" (qtd. in Pound, Letters 38), is reiterated by Yeats when he says: "I think with you that the poets seek truth, not abstract truth, but a kind of vision of reality that satisfies the whole truth" (L 588).

The Concept of Unity has been central to Yeats's poetic dogma and critical thought. It remained an indispensible part of his life and art. His idea of unity as a desirable component of literature and his belief that symbols can evoke this unity evolved from his own personal
experiences and his efforts to synthesize various divergent philosophies and subjects. In a lecture delivered in 1910, Yeats had identified and suggested two-pronged approach to achieve unity in literature. He advocated the assimilation of the 'personality of the writer in lyric poetry' and 'the imaginative personality in drama' (qtd. in Schricker 16). He used this device especially in the meditative poetry where he created imaginative personalities and objective characters in dramatic settings and his own personality as the Poetic 'I' to unite them in the verse. Yeats' stint as a dramatist and producer of plays is marked with a paradigm shift from the unity of literature and the visual arts offered by poetry of vision to that provided by drama. He perceived in theatre the perfect opportunities of rendering unity as exemplified by John Todhunter's *Helena of Troas* where in 'mood, acting, scenery and verse were all a perfect unity' (qtd. in Fletcher, *Guest* 184).

Inspired since early age by a persistent thought to 'hammer your thoughts into unity' (Ex 263), Yeats claimed to be motivated by this notion to forge unity even in disparate things. In *If I were Four and Twenty*, he asserts: 'I tested all I did by that sentence' (*Au* 128). Yeats' life long quest for perfection termed as 'Unity of Being' is not merely an idealistic but a rather remote intellectual concept based on the idea floated by J. B. Yeats that an individual should not, like Pater, value experience for its own sake nor should he subordinate experience to moral or religious principle. Rather he should search for a unity in which all the qualities of the personality could chime together (65). His earliest references to 'Unity of Being' are parallel to those that Dante used in *The Convito* to compare beauty to a perfectly proportioned human body. Yeats found ideal models of unity epitomized in the past, a period wherein the energies of those who made beautiful things were blended. He wanted the same reunification to take place in the modern art forms as well.

Conviction in the belief that a nation's unity came from its tradition appositely recorded in its literature led Yeats to explore and document shared mythology and folklores of Ireland. Yeats fervently hoped to bring together the two halves of Ireland so as to build a 'Unity of life' that would replace a great literature (Pinto 86). In his *Autobiographies*, Yeats accounts for his efforts in this context. He concedes that quite early in life he began to plot and scheme how one might seal with the right image the soft wax [of growing Irish disunity] before it began to harden. 'I thought we might bring the halves together if we had a national literature that made Ireland beautiful in the memory, and yet had been freed from provincialism by an exacting criticism...' (*Au* 62). Hoping to foster cultural unanimity, and
certain that Ireland had the potential and the means to create a great national literature which could form the basis of a cultural unity in Ireland, Yeats began to popularize among the educated the literary tradition and native stories which were till then known primarily to the uneducated. He records:

We had in Ireland imaginative stories, which the uneducated classes knew and even sang, and might we not take those stories current among the educated classes, rediscovering for the work’s sake what I have called the applied arts of literature, the association of literature, that is, with music, speech, and dance; and at last, it might be, so deepen the political passion of the nation that all, artist and poet, craftsman and day-labourer would accept a common design. (Au 119)

However, despite his strenuous efforts, the synthesis he dreamt of remained unfulfilled. John Heath-Stubbs avers: Yeats struggled to modify and enlarge his aesthetic scheme to include the political crisis of Irish nationalism (qtd. in Aestheticism 199). Yeats’ efforts resulted in his rediscovery of the concrete and the genuine beauty of the intellectual system and of the commonplace. This came as a revelation to him of the beauty of life of the individual, untrammelled by social or ethical considerations (200). His aesthetic perception deemed it fit for all experiences to be concretized through mysticism and symbolism. With the Romantics, he conceptualized a poet as a prophet, while as a votary of Symbolism, he regarded a poet to be a mystagogue - the priest of a private religion (200). Yeats adopted the latter role in Ireland and made his poetry the means of achieving spiritual exaltation and supremacy over others. Integrally connected with the on-going literary revival of interest in Irish legends and folklore, Yeats, along with John Millington Synge, made efforts to revive and popularize a typically Irish style of literature. Further inspired by O’Leary, Yeats took up the cause of the Gaeltic writers at a time when Irish literature was in danger of being lost due to British attempts to anglicize it. To popularize Gaeltic literature he began to collect Irish folklores. Concomitantly, convinced that Ireland needed a poetic stage to revive and revitalize its rich literature and having watched many symbolist productions at Theatre de L’Oeuvre, he returned to Dublin to start the Abbey Theatre. His contribution to Irish literary criticism is primarily in the form of canon-formation, for he pioneered the process of finalizing a body of Irish literature which, he deemed, best represented the rather new and still unrecognized literary tradition.
Unable to achieve this momentous synthesis in politics, he shifted his focus to achieve it on the personal front. He amalgamated into his personal system occult, Irish mythology, Indian spirituality, the ancient philosophy, magic and umpteen theories, apart from critiquing and imbibing influences from the works of other writers, thinkers and critics. However, it seemed a rather insurmountable challenge, given that his own philosophy and literary output is too diverse to be integrated into a single entity. John Senior in his book *The Way down and out: The Occult in Symbolist Literature* observes about W. B Yeats:

His realization that ‘Unity of Culture’ was impossible, given that the motive and aspiration of all differ, he turned his attention towards ‘Unity of being’ based on the occult supposition that man’s primary task is self-realization which could be achieved by fusion of intellect and emotion - To know thyself is to be everything. (39)

Another facet of this issue is underscored by Elizabeth Loizeaux’s assertion: ‘His essays and letters, however, reveal no conscious plan for uniting poetry with visual arts, largely because his sense of their interrelation was so deeply embedded that he rarely conceived of them as separate’ (Loizeaux 36). He was one with Blake in the latter’s perception that ‘man achieves the greatest imaginative vision when he finally apprehends unity by seeing that all things are analogous of all other things (Adams, Contrary 4-5). In an endeavour to achieve ‘Unity of Being’ Yeats tried to amalgamate diverse and divergent inputs into a coherent whole. Thus apart from forging a connection between the inner and the somatic self, he yoked together the Rhymer’s aestheticism with their special emphasis on form with the French-inspired symbolism, and his theosophical preoccupations with his nationalistic leanings. However, he did not wish this integration to compromise on the precedence of aesthetics over religion or politics. Even as a reviewer and critic of literature his stand point was romantic for all through he emphasized soul and imagination as against intellect and the mind in literature. Nevertheless, in 1919, Yeats admitted that though he desperately desired to give a single entity to his philosophy, nationalism and literature, it seemed rather impractical and unfeasible to unify his disparate yet passionate interests. Instead he began to concentrate on redefining and reassessing his craft. ‘This constant shifting and refining of associations fed the creative process: new juxtapositions of poetry and painting, new ways of viewing their alliance suggested to Yeats new poetic strategies and helped him finally to evolve his own style’ (Loizeaux 36).
Thus provinciality, prolixity and rhetoric marked Yeats' attempts at elucidating and recording his observations on the nuances and notions and components of literature. Nevertheless, certain issues remained paramount in Yeats' repertoire of literary criticism. Dominant among these was Unity which remained a matter of concern and much endeavour for Yeats, although the attempts remained ineffectual. Thus though he tried to forge mythical unity in literature, he succeeded in establishing only aesthetics of conflict. His critical credo could not convincingly resolve the disparity between the essential dualities: factual and the mythical and symbolic; between the cry of the heart and the necessity, and also between the desire to be a part of Maud Gonne's political world while longing to escape its reality.

Another significant aspect of Yeats' prosodic theory was the extensive use of mask, persona and voice to define and accentuate personality. Just as imagination was to the Romantics, for Yeats, the mask and the persona were tools of both self-expression and self-concealment which he used deftly and subtly to reflect upon the conflicts in personality. Thus in his insightful observations and analysis, Yeats tried hard to blend together his Romantic sensibility with his Modernism. Yet despite his attempts to modernize, his critical acuity and imaginative proclivity remained pro-Romantic rather than modern.

Undeniably, despite varying critical opinions about Yeats' insight or lack of it as a literary critic, there is no denying the fact that his literary criticism of the works of his contemporaries and his observations on literature in general display the lively reaction of an erudite critic to various ideological and artistic concerns of his age. His pragmatic approach towards literature in general and poetry in particular is inseparably intertwined with his own poetic achievements. The world may have grown hostile to some of his ideas, yet his instinctive sharpness as an artist, his psychological candour, and his versatility cannot be ignored. That is why, despite the publication of voluminous works on his craftsmanship, his imaginative thoughts and creative vision, no conclusive study has been able to fathom the depth of his literary and critical worth. He continues to remain an enigma - open to new interpretations, and new perspective studies mainly because of the multifariousness and complexities of his visionary precepts as a critic of literature.