A quintessential feature of philosophy and thought emerging from the same basic concept of the aesthetic experience is the paradoxical relationship between form and content. For ages, critics have been deliberating upon the issue of the significance of these two in art, especially literature. These two elements emerged as distinct entities in the Greek philosophy. The Greek Atomists considered form to be integral to the spatial organization of the structure of a body. For Plato, form was a vital component which along with matter provided sensory perception of things. To Aristotle, it was the detrimental component of the material things or the corporeal substance which constituted matter or content. Aristotle also believed that the form of an object, far from being an abstract ideal, existed within the structure of the object. He further asserted that our perception of varied experiences and our concept of beauty are perpetuated by our observations of real instances in life around us. This led him to differentiate between logos (the lexical content of speech) and lexis (the style of delivering that speech or the form).

Conventionally, form and content have been considered distinct and distinguishable from one another. The former is identified by the visual and auditory properties of language also called Syntactical Properties such as configuration, order and relation of sign vehicles, while the content signifies the designated meaning of the sign vehicles or the substance. This distinction between form and content has been taken up by Northrop Fry in selections from The Secular Scripture. Fry contends that form is the shaping spirit, the power of ordering or the constructive power of the mind, while content is the nature that is other than the imaginative power of the mind. Thus for him, form is conventional and formulaic, while content which may introduce reality or verisimilitude provides the matter that alters rigid formality. Later, Kant regarded form to be the organizing and synthesizing principle of matter or content. However, Hegel’s arguments on these two elements as embodied in his 1832 work Hegel’s Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art is the archetypal of all arguments. He conceptualized the relationship between form and content as an interaction of dialectical opposites which, nevertheless, stimulated mutual transformation. He had also stressed on the necessity of distinguishing form from content and yet the impossibility of separating the two into distinct entities.
Meanwhile, Georg Lukács, a Hungarian Marxist philosopher, aesthetician and literary critic while prioritizing content over form did not undermine the significance of form. Content, according to him, is neither a technical aid nor a product of the author’s subjective whim. Similarly, form is perceived by him as neither a vehicle to carry the content nor an artificial appendage. He deems them both as interrelated and inseparable. Believing them to be dialectically related, Lukács also endorsed Hegel’s view that content is nothing but the conversion of form into content and vice-versa. To him, the artistic form was invariably dictated by its content. Convinced that form can never be abstracted from history, he thought it to be always culturally and historically specific, every genre being the “outgrowth of definite social conditions and of the ideological premises of a particular society” (qtd in Clarke pdf). Hence, to achieve utmost artistic effectiveness, the content must be enshrined in a form that can help achieve his end.

Thus in the context of Literature, form can be said to render any work of art its peculiar individuality, and the matter contained within the form comprises its content. However, both these entities are intrinsically interwoven and cannot be separated without distorting their essential individuality. Consequently, any alteration in form, or the sensuous embodiment of content would distort the “aesthetic reality.” There being an inherent correlation between the two, a change in form leads to a change in content and inversely, every change in content requires a fundamental modification in its form. Hence as a corollary, it may be concluded that the artistic worth and superiority of a work is measured by the degree of the consistency and appropriateness of its form and the content. In art, content and form exist as two fundamental elements of a work and are distinctly recognized by the intellectual character of content as opposed to the material character of form. Thus the medium or technique applied in art or the style of writing in literature constitutes form.

Traditionally, in literature and art, form is perceived as either external or internal. Broadly speaking, form refers to the physical and visible characteristics inherent in a work of art. While the external form depends directly on the medium such as - auditory, verbal, plastic or postural, the internal form may include characterization, themes in epics, poetry and drama, the modes of melody and rhythm or the type of nature depicted in landscape or poetry. The content or the matter contained within the frameworks of a given form can be further divided into the conceptual or the ideological content and may include those elements of a work of art that express the knowledge and an intellectual and emotional evaluation of the
essence of the theme and the artist's attitude or intent behind the work of art. Hence in simple words, the content can be defined as what the work is about and form as how it is expressed. Since the artist communicates his thoughts and feelings through the content of a work of art, it varies from one work to another, and lends individuality and the determining essence to the work. Associated with these two elements is the concept of context - the idea behind the composition, the intention and the purpose of the artist which contextualizes a work and makes it meaningful.

However, inarguably it is the assimilation of both form and content which lends a work its characteristic distinctiveness. Helen Vendler defines these two in the following phrase: form is content - as - arranged; content is form - as - deployed (Vendler 14). In literary criticism, form primarily denotes a literary genre such as the short-story form, the dramatic form, the lyric form, the patterns in rhythm and music, the ballad form, the stanza form, the chorus etc. As per the definition of form in poetics, it can simply be defined as the manner in which a poem is composed as distinct from what it is about. J. A. Cuddon defines form in A Dictionary of literary Terms and Literary Theory as:

When we speak of the form of a literary work we refer to its shape and structure and to the manner in which it is made- as opposed to its substance or what it is about. Form and Substance are inseparable but they may be analysed and assessed separately. (Cuddon 327)

Often termed as the formal structure of a poem which is inherently connected to its meaning, as the body is with the soul, form has been vital to the creation of any literary work. Declan Kiberd opines that the assumption of a form can, indeed, be a challenging project:

The assumption of form can be a severe experience of humiliation: the self-conquest of the stylist is won only out of an initial degradation. However, the poet, if he were to wait for knowledge, might never begin his quest: and so he must start with a search for a form. William Blake saw the body as satanic, but Christ took that form; likewise the artist-martyr takes on the weaknesses of the flawed medium which he chooses before casting it off again. Incarnation and crucifixion are one declared Yeats, by which he meant that style and form pursued outside the self by a poet are fully known as one only at the moment of death. (311)
In William Butler Yeats’s view, art and by extension literature, is not as it is traditionally interpreted, primarily representation of an expression or intellectual forms. Literature to him, was a way of thinking and constructing reality linguistically. For him the critical faculty was far more than just a means for greater form, method, precision, proportions, arrangement (Arnold 381). In *A Vision*, he has elucidated his objective of literary criticism:

The close of the last century was full of a strange desire to get out of form, to get some kind of disembodied beauty, and now it seems to me the contrary impulse has come. I feel about me and in me an impulse to create form, to carry the realization of beauty as far as possible. (*L* 402)

A prolific writer, Yeats typified his beliefs, often in a veiled and vague manner, provoking his detractors to accuse him of being inconsistent and obscure. Having spent his life in search of a reality of beautiful patterns and deepest meanings, his diverse critical ideas are found embedded in the text of his poetry, plays and prose too. Yeats’s musings on various issues crop up randomly in his poems, letters and essays often, circuitously, many a times in the middle of an elucidation or discourse about his own poems, or while evaluating the work of some other writer. Consequently, his theory of criticism, particularly poetry cannot be assessed in isolation for it does not exist as a concrete and distinctive entity. Besides, since Yeats exemplifies his ideology, his views on form and content, too, cannot be isolated from his literary output.

Given that Yeats believed form and content to be interrelated and integrated, his critiques of the works of his contemporaries, his predecessors and his own craft was based on the assessment of both the aspects concurrently. Regarding form, Yeats opined that it would not be:

possible for anybody to deny the importance of form, in all its kinds, for although you can expound an opinion, or describe a thing, when your words are not quite well chosen, you cannot give a body to something that moves beyond the senses, unless your words are as subtle, as complex, as full of mysterious life, as the body of a flower, or of a woman. The form of sincere poetry, unlike the form of the popular poetry may indeed be sometimes obscure, or ungrammatical as in some of the best of the *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, but it must have all this whether it be a
little song made out of the dreams of one poet and of a hundred generations whose hands were never weary of the sword. (*E&I* 163-164)

This impulse to create form hints at a writer’s heightened technical consciousness and a desire to execute greater control in terms of diction, language and cadence. Yeats, too, was keen to initiate experimentation with innovatory forms to embody the content in a befitting form, yet quite early in his literary career he had concluded that beauty had to be realized, embodied or made tangible and that a man can embody truth but he cannot know it (*L* 922). Within his own literary matrix, Yeats embodied his wide-ranging content into varied forms, most prominent being the verse form, the dramatic form, the genre of novel, prose, essays, autobiography and letters. His critical credo also manifested in detail the motley of elements which constitute the core of the external forms. These include language and diction, rhythm and music, images and symbols, metaphors, and masks, to name a few.

Of the innumerable structural and literary devices which, according to Yeats, forge the bond between form and content is the use of appropriate language-simple, lucid and concrete. He also asserted:

> We should write out our own thoughts in as nearly as possible the language we thought them in as in a letter to an intimate friend. We should not disguise them in anyway...personal utterance which had almost ceased in English literature could be as fine an escape from rhetoric and abstraction as drama itself. But my father would hear of nothing but drama; personal utterance was only egotism. (qtd. in Pierce IV 167)

Conceding form and content to be inextricably interwoven and thus inseparable, his critique of these entities of literature are thus interconnected. Yeats perceived literature as a tapestry wherein form and content were interlaced into the thought and texture of the work. Consequently, clubbing his adherence to the radical Romantic tradition with the traditions of the Decadents, Yeats built an ideology to explore the possibilities of amalgamating the past and the present through simplicity and directness of speech into an appropriate form. He supported both - the significance of the heroic and nationalist content which the Decadents propagated, and the technique as propounded by the Rhymers. Yeats firmly believed that a true artist must suitably reconcile form to its content and vice versa. For him, a greater challenge was that of making modern language and forms suitable instruments to elucidate the themes, whether in prose, lyric or play. In fact, Ellmann discerns a definite association
between these two in Yeats' writings: We are justified in discovering general corollaries of these different emphases in the two styles which he put against each other. The one was simple, based more on theory than on Irish peasant dialect; the other was elaborate and resembled that of the English Pre-Raphaelites and the Rhymers. The first emphasised content by making the form inconspicuous; the sound elaborated the form and obscured the content

Symbolism, according to Yeats, is integral to the study of form of any literary work. As such his concept of symbolism was inextricably blended with his poetics of form. His symbolic aesthetics regarded symbolism as holding the greatest of all powers for it could say things which could not be said so perfectly in any other way (E&I 146). In fact, for Yeats: it gave dumb things voice and bodiless things bodies (147). To him, the source of much of symbolism was the great memory. He used this concept of Anima Mundi to expound his theory of transposition of the physical and the supernatural to the ideal. Yeats' opinion on Symbolism are best depicted in his essay The Symbolism of Poetry which reiterates that what is beyond the senses must be given body, or in other words, a form.

Inspired by his association with the theosophical society which believed in the inherent mysteriousness of a symbol, Yeats believed that symbols lay beneath the consciousness and could be invoked only when the hold of the rational mind on the consciousness gets loosened and the artist masters the esoteric magical powers to produce symbolic talisman (E&I 148). In a letter to Tynan, he asserted that to comprehend Blake fully one has to understand the signature of Blake's genius - his symbolic system. Concomitantly, his essay The Necessity of Symbolism echoes theosophical thought and also expounds the theories of the Great Memory and universality of Symbolism in his later works. Analogous to this is his theory of Anima Mundi, the mother of muses as a complex amalgamation of individual memories which transcends individual personality. He presumed the buried memories of humanity to be a storehouse of visions and symbols evoked consciously by the masters of magic and half consciously by their successors, the poet, the musician and the artist (E&I 49). This view has found favour with a group of psychologists who perceived in Yeats' declaration an anticipation of the study of archetypal patterns.

Further, Yeats categorized symbols derived from the Great Memory as inherent and those shaped and formulated by a poet as arbitrary for the latter had no connection with the Anima Mundi. He credited Blake with coining arbitrary symbols and making a subtle use of
them in his poetry. In his essay “William Blake and the Imagination,” he posited thus about Blake’s symbolism:

He was a symbolist who had to invent his symbols; and his counties of England, with their correspondence to the tribes of Israel, and his mountains and rivers, with their correspondence to parts of man’s body, are arbitrary as some of the symbolism in the *Axel* of the symbolist Villiers de l’Isle Adam is arbitrary, while they mix incongruous things as *Axel* does not. (114)

Connecting symbolism and content on yet another plane, Yeats divided the poetic symbols into emotional and intellectual symbols. While the former evoke emotions alone and therefore remained away from the rhythm and pattern, the two vital elements of form; the intellectual symbols evoked ideas or ideas mixed with emotions. Moreover, Yeats floated the theory of the great procession of symbols which renders symbols their peculiar meaning and beauty. Consequently, he deciphered Rossetti’s symbols as belonging to the great procession of Christian symbols and hence meaningful. He also commended Keats and Calvert for using symbols which invoked an infinite emotion, a perfected emotion, a part of the divine essence although they remained fragmentary symbolists for they did not always set their symbols in the great procession. Yeats also examined some of the symbols of Burne, Blake, Nash and Shakespeare to assess how the symbols lend the story its beauty, as a sword-blade may flicker with the light of burning towers. Yeats’ opinion on Symbolism, best expounded in his essay The Symbolism of Poetry, reiterated that what is beyond the senses must be given body or a form. This essay, along with many others, in *Ideas of Good and Evil,* constitutes Yeats’ fullest contribution to symbolist thought. Even in the poetic oeuvre of both Shelley and Blake, Yeats found definite traces of symbols sourced from the Anima Mundi. He credited Blake with forging the indissoluble marriage of all great art with symbol and extolled Shelley for creating images which are certainly symbols by allowing the subconscious life to lay its hands so firmly upon the rudder of imagination... Equating Shelly with Plato and Porphyry, Yeats perceived in Shelly’s imaginative fecundity the capability of transforming an image into a symbol transcending both time and space (E&I 78).

Thus for Yeats, Symbols embodied the abstract in visual form. They represented the common language shared by all art forms especially poetry and painting. He was certain that
symbols with their innate potential of carrying connotations and multiple meanings enable the poet to resist the temptation of having to set out those meanings sequentially. This helped to enhance the appeal, and maintain brevity of the lyric which remained Yeats’s hallmark all through his literary career. In a letter to Katherine Tynan, Yeats had accepted to have used Symbolism extensively. He elucidated this by claiming that in the second part of Óisin under the disguise of Symbolism, I have said several things to which I only have the key. The romance is for the 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 cloud (qtd. in Ellmann, Mask 52).

However, Yeats contradicts himself when he changes his prior assertion on the necessity of using private symbols, understandable to the writer himself to a later contention that the symbols must be interpretable by the public. As he matured he also felt that the symbols should neither be evasive nor illegitimate although he also suggested that symbols may not necessarily represent really the truth. Symbols and formulae, he wrote to Florence Farr, are powers, which act in their own right and with little consideration for our intentions, however excellent (qtd. in Parkinson, 215). Thus for Yeats, Symbols were not merely a structural device to express subtly the sentiments of a writer, they seemed problematic too. He hinted the inherent limitations of symbols in the latter essay. He observes:

We may call it metaphorical writing but it is better to call it symbolic writing, because metaphors are not profound enough to be moving, when they are not symbols, and when they are symbols they are the most perfect of all, because the most subtle, outside of pure sound, and through them one can best find out what symbols are. (E&I 156)

For Yeats, form manifested itself also as the rhythm in a work of art. Insights into the aural dimensions of his critical theory and his own works show sound as an integral component of form. To him, the aural patterns in poetry were analogous to that of visual patterns in art. He observed: Rhythm is not merely a mechanical beat but a perfect marriage of speech and of metrical form (L 543). He also believed it to be indispensable to the structure of a work, as it substantially enhanced the appeal of the work. In The Symbolism of Poetry, he averred:
The purpose of rhythm, it has always seemed to me, is to prolong the moment of contemplation, the moment when we are both asleep and awake, which is the one moment of creation, by hushing us with an alluring monotony, while it holds us waking by variety, to keep us in that state of perhaps real trance, in which the mind liberated from the pressure of the will is unfolded in symbols. (\textit{E&I} 159)

Yeats also advocated incorporating organic rhythms as an embodiment of imagination. In his own poems, he did not want any rhythms to be superficially inserted; in fact, in many poems he changed punctuation and non-rhyming words subtly to insert natural rhythm. Unusually interested in the way verse sounds, he even attempted to communicate his theory of sound and music especially for his own plays and poems. The array of diagrams, charts and annotations which Yeats provided with the text of his works, however, were more confusing than elucidating to the readers and the audience. His passion for incorporating appropriate music in any literary form can be gauged from the fact that in the 1900s, he collaborated with Florence Farr and Arnold Dolmetsch to get his poems chanted at specific pitches to the accompaniment of a psaltery, and this interest in poetry as a performance in sound was retained throughout his life and found its most profound manifestation in his Broadside Project of the 1930s. Believing rhythm to be indispensible to creation, in an essay which Yeats wrote in collaboration with F. R. Higgins, a folk musician, he asserted that "the poet who thinks himself ignorant of music will sometime write unconsciously to tunes" (\textit{LDW} 34).

It was in the 1890s that Yeats began to make concrete efforts to refine his poetic belief on rhythm, for he comprehended that the purpose of rhythm was to prolong the moment of contemplation. (\textit{E&I} 159) Since form is manifested through varied elements within a text and not merely by its genre, rhythm is vital to form. He further equated rhythm to the ticking of watch made softer and more various (159) which lent a definitude to the form. After \textit{Wandering of Oisin}, he loosened his rhythm (\textit{Au} 74) having realized that serious poetry must reject those energetic rhythms, as of a man running and incorporate those wavering, meditative, organic rhythms, which are the embodiment of the imagination (\textit{E&I} 163). Yeats revitalized rhythm and metered poetry giving it a new voice. He used the device of poetic forms to their utmost potential rendering it refreshingly new yet colloquial in tenor. The music and rhythm in his works, in keeping with his dictum that music should be functional and enhance the effect, often echoed its themes. Thus the alliteration of \textit{Lake}
Water lapping perfectly captured the soothing sound of water. His fascination for all things traditional led him to choose traditional rhythms over the modern free verse. *Vers Libre*, according to him was an ideal medium or verse form for those who lacked clarity of thought and were prone to impassioned utterance. He did not adopt this form as Ezra Pound or Eliot did. In fact, he insisted on traditional meter on the plea that:

Because I need a passionate syntax for passionate subject-matter I compel myself to accept those traditional metres that have developed with the language. Ezra Pound, Turner, Lawrence wrote admirable free verse, I could not... 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. (*E&I* 521-3)

Perceiving in the rhythm the potential to determine the contents of the work, Yeats was certain that it could also enhance the efficacy of the chosen form. His belief in the power of rhythm can be estimated from his conviction that rhythm could liberate the mind from the pressure of the will and that it could induce visions. In this context, Vinod Sena avers: Blank Verse, for instance, suggested ideally the sensibility of an age of transition, approaching through a slurring-over of some of the accents and the absence of rhythm, the motions of ordinary speech, and yet preserving, through the regularity of its iambics, the suggestion of communal life of song and dance (Sena 78). Rhythm or dialogues in meter also helped Yeats to reconcile two apparently dissimilar styles of writing prose and verse in his plays although he evaded theorizing his intentions clearly. Commenting on a similar equivocation in Yeats' prose essays, Ellmann says: In his principal prose essays, he [Yeats] used that devious way of writing which he had evolved so that his growing cautiousness about his own ideas could be successfully concealed under an appearance of taking the reader into confidence (153).

The patterns of metrical arrangement were regarded by Yeats not merely an essential appendage to form but an ever-evolving entity with changing sensibilities. Consequently, within his literary oeuvre, there is no period of continued metrical regularity or orthodoxy. Helen Vendler feels that for Yeats stanza was a vehicle he could not resist distorting....In his hands, its stately Renaissance measure- which Shelley in large part preserved- can remain ceremonious, musical and harmoniously proportioned or it can be rewritten, structurally,
semantically and rhymingly into a modern nervous colloquial and cacophonous version of itself (qtd. in Mcdonald 29).

Adhering to most of the conventional and traditional forms of English rhyme, Yeats, however, showed a clear preference for rhymed poems and endeavoured to revive Ottawa Rima and trimeter abab quatrain. However, he also wrote many unrhymed poems in blank verse or unrhymed iambic pentameter. In this context Helen Vendler posits that, Yeats thought blank verse a good medium for two sorts of expository lyric occasions: dialogue on one hand and doctrine on the other hand, in the long run, doctrine supplanted dialogue (245). Yeats also wished long poems to be popular form of expression of poetic thought and themes. Consequently, he lamented the fact that an absorption in fragmentary sensuous beauty or detachable ideas had deprived us of the power to mould vast material into a single image (Pierce III 360). Ironically his own attempt at writing long poems such as Upon a Dying Lady or Broken Dreams were marred by fragmentation and abstraction which he professed to detest. This fragmentation in form clearly indicates his emulation of the Modernists despite his declaration to the contrary. Association with theatre sharpened Yeats notion of the function and range of rhythm in poetic drama. Rhythm, for Yeats came to represent the very crux of the poet's craft - rhythm defined, of course, not as mechanical beat, but as perfect marriage of speech and metrical form. (L 543).

As affirmed earlier, to the Rhymers, poetry was a public art, the beauty of which was euphony. Instead of associating poetry with the visual, or pictorial, the Rhymers gave more significance to cadence. They equated form with music which, in their poetics, had ramifications on the subject. Initially Yeats had endorsed their opinion but gradually he drifted away from their dogmatic ideas towards the Romantic notion of rhythm. The Romantics, although considering music as an imperative component of form, had never conceded to the superiority of music over poetry as the Rhymers did. Shelley had defined a poem as an image of life expressed in its eternal truth and poetry as something divine (Shelly 115) while Coleridge in his definition of a poet ascribed the poet with the task of bringing the whole soul of man into activity with the subordination of its faculties to each other, according to their relative worth and dignity (Coleridge 12). Thus the Romantics, while conceding to poetry's kinship with music, did not ascribe to its pre-eminence over poetic form. Yeats adhered to similar notion but was also aware of Pater's assertion of the uniquenss of music in its obliteration of the form-content division. Pater had argued that,
music is the highest of the arts since it has in greatest degree, the perfect fusion of form and content (Pater 65). He typified a close synthesis between form and content, based on that of Hegel who had held music to be at the crux of all the modern arts.

Within his own literary matrix, Yeats rejected the ‘Art for Art sake’ theory and the Rhymers’ preoccupation with music as euphony, and tried to strike a balance between the public or social purpose of literature. In fact, the theory of criticism which he proposed at the Rhymers’ Club meetings in London emphasised that literature must be an expression of one’s passion, exhibiting noble emotion, and one’s convictions. He also recognized its connection with tradition and conceded that the Rhymers’ penchant for music also implied an anti-intellectual stance, and an antithesis to the rhetoric form. Thus incorporating music, he experimented with varied forms such as ballads, Psaltery, Broadcast poetry and even got his own poetry read out to music. Nevertheless, Yeats could not ascertain the extent to which music could be integrated into the structure of his own poems; consequently as for the two BBC broadcasts of modern poetry, Yeats had issued the following instructions:

There must never be an accompaniment, and no words must be spoken through music, though a pause may sometimes be marked by a few low musical notes. They must never be loud enough to shift the attention of the ear. (qtd. in Hone, 454)

According to Daniel Albright, Yeats was ambivalent to the problem of form and content in poetry. His attitude towards these two essential components of literature wavered from a clear preference to content in the initial years of his literary career, and to form in his late poetry. However, he never advocated subordination of content to accommodate form as the dominant element. In this context, Albright feels that the young Yeats thought that modern art has triumphed by a steady emptying of its contents (Albright, Korea 25). Yeats did not approve of the over emphasis on form given by the Modernists, nor did he agree with Wordsworth, Tennyson, Browning [who] had all erred by over inclusion- by trying to absorb into their work science, politics, philosophy, ethics, until their poems became hopelessly heavy, distended (UP II 39).

Experimentation with forms was vital to Yeats’ literary craft. Having begun his literary career with Mosada, The Island of Statues and The Seeker in the dramatic form, Yeats turned to epic writing but an unsuccessful stint at the epic form made him turn to drama which was flourishing in the period of transition. His conviction that the subject of all action
is passion led him to conclude that passion could not, therefore, be evoked in abstraction. He was also convinced that the dramatic form provided the dramatist an escape from abstraction by focusing on the central conflict or the dramatic action. Denouncing abstractions as redundant and superfluous, Yeats asserted that passion can only be contemplated when separated by itself, purified of all but itself, and aroused into perfect intensity by opposition with some other passion, ...or external nature (Ex 155). This principle was applicable to poetic form as well, leading Yeats to assert: all the finest poetry comes logically out of the fundamental action (L 460). According to Hone, Dramatic action, centring on conflict and tension, became for Yeats the prototype of all action in poetry to such an extent that he came to regard it as the essence of all life and of all art... (Hone 458-9). His preference for dramatic form can be traced back to his early writings as well. His earlier poems such as The Isles of Statues and The Wandering of Oisin were ornate epic poems. In poems like The Cloak, The Boat and the Shoes, he used the dialogue form, based on a simple pattern of traditional folk song, employing a sting of question and answers to elicit the content. The narrative frame and evocative dialogues were also used in Ephemera and Adam’s Curse. However, since these poems are mainly in the dialogue form, they show greater affinity to drama than to fiction.

Experimenting with a variety of forms of drama, Yeats imbibed many of its quintessential features into his poetry as well. Thus most of his early poetic works were dramatic in form. Exploring the immense potential of drama to explicate personal and nationalistic agenda, Yeats critiqued the varied dramatic forms and intently advocated blank verse for drama. In this context, M. L. Rosenthal posits: Yeats hardly possessed the theatrical genius of Shakespeare, who could draft wonderfully suggestive, sometimes difficult lines and passages into his five-act poetic plays, and still keep the action galloping ahead of all the viewers. But Yeats’ short, concentrated pieces are serious experiments - essentially for modern audiences with little experience of any verse drama apart from the revivals of Shakespeare and certain classics- in mating lyrical craftsmanship with stagecraft. We have seen how, from his earliest verse onward, he builds poems in dialogue form (Rosenthal 160).

Subsequently, Yeats also turned some of his prose plays into verse dramas making them more lyrical than dramatic in form. For instance, he transformed The Hour Glass (1903) into verse drama in 1903. His concern in the beginning was primarily with the heroic. The
Countess Cathleen and The Hour Glass followed the morality model while the early plays from Cuchulain Cycle were based on the Greek form of drama. Subsequently, he turned to the Noh plays of Japan and also presented Dance plays. In the middle period of his literary career, the dance form became emblematic of pure form which subsumed the intellectual content. In fact, his foray into the Noh plays and the Dance plays can be read as typifying his poetic belief that literature should be more suggestive than explicative in both form and content. In fact, he hinted to the poets that half said things are more attractive, for they added to the beauty of the work by leaving ample scope for exploration by the intellect, and also opened up avenues for multiple interpretations of a given situation, image or symbol.

Veiling his own works in a charade of mystery, mysticism and evocative ambience, Yeats explores a variety of themes and forms in his own literary oeuvre, especially in the form of modern mystery plays (L 280). The Land of Heart’s Desire is a journey into a fairyland, The Pot of Broth is a fun rollicking farce, and The Shadowy Waters a symbolic drama of escape. Similarly, The Player Queen is a mixture of farce and symbolism while The Words upon the Windowpane is written in a realistic form. Concomitantly, Yeats deplored the contemporary drama of murder and sentiment, for merely "photographing life." He favoured one-act form of plays which he found ideal to present the dramatic structure. Nevertheless, the most preferred form of dramatic art for Yeats remained the verse drama. Yeats also realized that even Shelley and Mallarme had struggled to evolve perfect poetic drama. As the successors of Shakespeare, they had strived to break free from the Shakespearean tradition to express mystical experiences. Shelley too had begun the search for an ideal poetic form, although he did not succeed. Drawing a parallel between Yeats and Shelley, Harold Bloom says, "Yeats found in Noh what the Romantics had sought for themselves but failed to find - a form for drama that suited their intricate sensibilities (Yeats 293).

A visionary and an exponent of the neo-Modernist movement of the 20th century European drama, Yeats desired to liberate contemporary theatre from its restrictive naturalist constraints. Though he failed as a dramatist of popular drama, he succeeded in promoting and staging abstract plays which depicted his envisioned spiritual experience, using minimalistic stage setting to augment intimacy with the audience. Paradoxically, the use of devices such as masks, methodical movement, stylized music and symbolic dance distanced the audience from the dramatist and his work. Nevertheless, he succeeded in "elevating his incantatory verse and archetypal themes, turning drama into poetry (Dorn 122). His dance plays deserve
special mention, for they amalgamated belief and structure. In an attempt to devise a new form of drama called *Theatre of Art* he suggested innovations in the judicious use of space, shadow and light as also of poetry, dance and mask. However, his over-ambitious endeavour at experimenting with voice, movement and staging got only a lukewarm response from the theatre-goers and even the critics dismissed his effort as either a futile attempt to revive an obsolete art form or as anachronistically idealistic.

The drama he proposed relied upon an idealization of common speech and melodious lyric elaboration of personal emotions. It was a form far more stringent than either epic or lyric, compelling one to work within a definite framework of time and to satisfy an immediate and rather mixed audience instead of some imaginary body of responsive readers that might grow up in a hypothetical future (Sena 69). The dramatic art form was adopted by Yeats to generate greater intensity, focus on passionate action and a medium to highlight the concurrent social and political scenario of the evolving European society. Believing that the artistic value of the dramatic form should be contemporary, he not only chose topics and situations primarily from folklores and Irish mythology as the content of his drama, but also contextualized them to comment on the current issues. Mc Ateer observes that Yeats believed that *any* literary expression devoid of temporal reality or divorced from locality would struggle to find a perspective on the underlying patterns of contemporary historical experience and instead, become absorbed in the ephemeral surface moments (194).

Analogous to this was his discovery of the Japanese Noh form of plays which helped Yeats to recreate Celtic themes, folklores and ancient legends in a mystical atmosphere and an abstract structure. Staged for and appreciated by a few, Yeats claimed to have invented a new form of intellectual and aesthetic drama which he termed *aristocratic drama*. His choice of form and the content of his plays, just like his poetry, were not merely personal, they were a manifestation of his beliefs not only about how and what should be incorporated in literature, but also his critical notion of how life should be lived. They illustrate the concerns of the humanity depicting universal mystery of the unequal equation between the spiritual and material facets of human nature. For instance, *The Land of Heart’s Desire* is a beautiful folk play which depicts the luring away of the soul of a newly married woman by a child fairy. The first play to be staged at the Avenue Theatre in London in 1894, it became famous for its lilt and song. His early plays such as *The Island of Statues* are romantic and mournful. Similarly, *The Countess Cathleen* (1892), a verse play, inspired by his unrequited
love for Maud Gonne, portrays his personal feelings and an indirect message to choose subjective life as opposed to the realities of evil of the times.

A shift from the romantic Arcadian themes to more realistic contemporary themes was motivated by Ezra Pound who influenced Yeats into imbibing precision, clarity and greater firmness by eliminating abstractions, which were more distracting than functional in his plays. Resultantly, Yeats displayed sure signs of sparse new verse and greater dramatic appeal than the previous plays. In the preface to his volume of Collected Poems, Yeats acknowledged this shift: ‘to me drama...has been the search of more manful energy...instead of those outlines of lyric poetry, as in The Wind among the Reeds (1899), that are blurred with desire and vague regret’ (qtd. in Ellmann Identity 90).

The failure of poetic drama to sustain as a popular form was attributed by Yeats to the looseness and decadence of the Elizabethan dramatic form. He also blamed the rising commercialization and Puritanism in England for its decline. Similarly showing his repugnance at the rather lukewarm or hostile response of the London audience, who with little appreciation for poetry wanted ‘more matter of fact conversations’. Yeats compares them with the Elizabethan spectators who appreciated and sought ‘more numerous passages of poetic oratory, and more audacious metaphors’ (VPL 417). He recorded: ‘If our modern poetic form has failed, it is mainly because always dominated by the example of Shakespeare; it would restore an irrevocable past’ (417). Besides he found fault with not merely the liberal borrowings from the predecessors which affected the thought, language, and the vehicle of expression, but rued the creeping in of ‘what we call decadence’ into form and content of poetry (Ex 190).

In his critical matrix, Yeats expounds his theory of form and content of novel as well. Experimenting with the genre of novel, Yeats also contemplated on how this art form essentially differed from the poetic form. He observed, ‘Unlike a poem, a novel requires so much minute observation of the surface of life that a novelist who cares for the illusion of reality will keep to familiar things’ (Ex 160). His presumption that ‘popular novels were the lowest form of art’ (Ex 5), propelled him to be deliberately artistic and pragmatic in this endeavour. At this juncture, regarding objectivity to be inartistic and ineffective, he favoured personal subjective expressions and subject matters to be most appropriate for this form. Consequently, he derided George Moore’s Esther Waters (1894) on the plea that the novel’s protagonist was a ‘personification’ and hence an abstraction. Also Yeats’ insistence on
beauty more than realism distinguished him from the realists of the 1890s whose "one concern," according to Holbrook Jackson, "was to get into his work the quality of life, the sense of reality, irrespective of the presence or absence of moral ideas, leaving beauty and immortality to chance." (220). Sean O'Casey's play *The Silver Tame* was also criticized by Yeats for being too abstract although interestingly his own novel was marred by abstract editorial commentary.

Yeats' autobiography is another of his greatest achievements in form. Through its various sections, he presents a poetic series of impressions which George Russell calls "pure externalities." It does not present merely a chronological account of an artist's life, rather it lays bare episodic random reminiscences on a host of people and issues. In this regard, it also becomes a statement of his poetic theory and an account of his growth as an artist. According to Daniel O'Hara, Yeats' effort in the genre is "accidental" or "anecdotal" in design and "external" or "two-dimensional" in its portraits of others and even more damningly, in its impressions of the creative life (Pierce iv 65). His autobiography is also "imaginatively reflexive, for it includes, embedded in its rhetorical structure, a critical gloss on the method" (71). Thus Yeats' exploration of the autobiographic form of literature is a unique effort by a man who had diverse tastes, interests and a penchant for experimentation in both form and content.

Other genres which elucidate Yeats' critical and literary acuity are the letters, reviews written for varied journals and his collection of essays. In fact, Yeats tried his hand on almost all the major forms of literature popular in his times to embody his copious literary and critical musings on diverse issues and contents. In his prose writings, he uses anecdotal style of writing rather than academic, objective and impersonal method. Moreover, even in his prose the emphasis is not so much on form as on the content and its relevance to the topic in hand. However, it is in the poetic form that he exhibits the most variety of form and content.

Having begun quite early in his career as a poet, Yeats' penchant for lyricism grew with his affinity with the Rhymers - a club of poets which he co-founded with Ernest Rhys in 1890. These poets of retreat, whom Yeats tried to mythologize by calling "Tragic Generation" in his Autobiography, had endeavoured to "purify poetry." The members of this club were inspired by the Romantic and the Expressive tradition, Pater's aesthetics and the prose and poetry of the Symbolists and Decadents, especially Verlaine and Mallarme. Poetry, to them, was an art form which had fidelity to the created objects and said little about the perceptive
world. Pater had also regarded poetry quite "inadequate to express the infinitely complex and substantive spiritualities of the modern world; in it the content of consciousness becomes separated from the sensuous element and transcends it." (65). Yeats also endorsed Pater's assertion:

Since poetry appeals to the intellect first, the form-content distinction can never be obliterated in poetry. But the ideal type of poetry is that in which the distinction is reduced to its minimum; so that lyrical poetry, precisely because in it we are least able to detach the matter from the form, without a deduction of something from that matter itself is, at least artistically, the highest and most complete form of poetry. (Pater, Renaissance 97)

Lyrical form fascinated the members of the Rhymers' club and, in turn, Yeats. Meanwhile, Yeats was disillusioned by Victorian straight-jacketed conformity in form, language and content. Since the latter had technically turned their backs on epics and dramatic monologues to favour fixed forms, especially the lyrical formalization, Yeats who himself was writing in varied genres did not approve of their ideology. In fact, at that time, Yeats was not alone in emulating the Rhymers. Eliot and Pound too, like Yeats, adopted the lyrical genre popularized by the Rhymers. However, while the Rhymers insisted on preserving "pure poetry" and hence stuck to "Art for Art's sake" theory, Yeats, while following them, improvised his writings by making them more socially relevant.

As stated earlier, conviction that colloquial language as spoken by the commoners was best suited to express the innermost thoughts led Yeats, initially, to take up lyric form in all its simplicity. However, his association with the Rhymers made him contemplate on the necessity of donning poetic mask instead of conforming only to pure form as the Rhymers did. He later vindicated this stand elaborately in his theory of poetics and measured the worth of his contemporaries by applying the same doctrine on to their poetic output. Consequently, he found fault with the poets of the "Tragic Generation" and the Rhymers, for they had failed to wear the masks of other people and characters. Conversely, Yeats extolled the Rhymers and credited them with opposing and highlighting the Victorian corruption in art. Concomitantly, he realized that despite being a genuine movement which proposed a necessary point of departure from the contemporary poetic experiments, the Rhymers failed to provide a substantial alternative to the Victorian mode. To the Rhymers, "pure poetry" remained the chosen form for its innate sense of music and cadence, which, they perceived as
vital components of form and content. They aspired and strived to promote purest lyricism, free from rhetorical contamination. Their insistence led to their poetic decline and eventually demise.

However, Yeats, Pound and Eliot, though technically influenced by the Rhymers, endeavoured not to repeat their mistakes. Hence they preferred to incorporate harsher and socially compelling realities instead of mere romanticism into their works. Thus, they incorporated change in both form and content in order to refine their own craft, although Yeats resolutely favoured the efficacy of traditional form as the most apposite structure to encase content. Conceding regular verse to be the most conspicuous manifestation of form in poetry, Yeats approved of and appreciated the traditional form the most. No wonder that a key poet of the 20th century, Yeats is regarded as the master of traditional forms. Yeats has elucidated his preference that underscores his own craft in this regard thus:

If I write of personal love or 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 Shelly’s Platonist, that tower Palmer drew. Talk to me of originality and I will turn on you with rage. (E&I 522)

Nevertheless, Yeats did not confine his content to be embodied only in the traditional forms. At the turn of the century, a counter movement began to be felt in Yeats’ critical thought and works. Seeking a complete unison or reconciliation between form and content, he began to favour a new strength and solidity of content, form and expression in place of disembodiment. In a letter of 1903, he wrote:

I am no longer in much sympathy with an essay like “The Autumn of the Body”. …the close of the last century was full of a strange desire to get out of form, to get some kind of disembodied beauty, and now it seems to me the contrary impulse has come. I feel about me and in me an impulse to create form, to carry the realization of beauty as far as possible. (qtd. in Sarkar 84)

Similarly, Yeats also asserted, “I have also felt that the soul has two movements primarily: one to transcend form, and the other to create forms... (84). In fact, the neglect of
the latter by other writers infuriated him. Concurrently, while showing a definite inclination towards form, Yeats did not negate the importance of content. This is apparent from his assertion: "I was so angry with the indifference to subject which was the common place of all (recent) art criticism....that I could at times see nothing else but subject" (qtd. in Albright xxv).

Reformulation of Yeats' poetic and critical theory with regards to the relationship between form and content especially in poetry began around 1903, when he, realising that he was writing in a listless manner, repudiated it to embrace a more masculine form. He observed: "The error of late periods like this is to believe that some things are inherently poetic... I believe more strongly every day that the element of strength in poetic language is common idiom" (Ford 170). He regarded some of the poems by Dorothy Wellesley as apt examples of "nobility of style" which he deemed integral to any poetic piece of worth.

Also, with Unity of Being as his critical credo, Yeats remained preoccupied with the issue of the essential indivisibility of a poem or a play. Believing form to be a unified and concrete entity, Yeats deplored dividing a work into its varied components to analyse it structurally as the school of Structuralism suggested. In fact, Yeats felt that the onus of writing in a form which could not be further divided without distorting the meaning lay on the poet. Consequently, his own poems are best appreciated as organic wholes wherein nothing is superficial which can be removed without disfiguring the import of the poem. For him, divisions in the arts are almost all in the first instance technical (E&I 289). Nevertheless, he proposed "setting things above one another, Epic and Drama above Lyric... and not merely side by side" (E&I 334). Emphasizing poetry as the supreme form of knowledge, Yeats believed it to be "alone permanent." His views on the nature and purpose of poetry perceived it as a perennial form. He regarded it as a product of quarrel on two planes: one which tries to judge, punish and reform and the other, the product of the quarrel within. However, Yeats disapproved of using poetry as a tool to moralize. He strongly felt that morality should not be allowed to put the imagination into handcuffs (Ex 201).

Unlike the Modernists, Yeats did not favour free verse. He recommended the use of and also incorporated within his lyric form sterner tense, taunt and austere language and "more direct approach" to themes and content by abandoning the conventional Romantic poetic diction. The content of his early lyrics, inspired primarily by Pre-Raphaelite paintings, revolved around mystical or esoteric subjects and the theme of love encased in lyric form. He
used narrative form in his long work The Wandering of Oisin which won him recognition on the literary scene. However, with time and experience, his critical thought and ideology also evolved. Talking about his passion for Narrative poetry, he wrote to Katharine Tynan that his ideas of a poem had greatly changed since he had written The Island of Statues, for that was a region while Oisin was a series of incidents. Nevertheless, he wished to embody the highest possible thought in the simplest possible form. He conceded that since in narrative verse the attention was on the fact of the story, not the form; the form must be presented as something, we all accept- the fundamental sing-song. I do not know a single example of good narrative where the rhyme scheme is varied (L 82).

For Yeats, the choice of the form also depended on the content or the subject matter in hand. For instance, for representing Irish culture authentically Yeats, under Lady Gregory's tutelage, decided to use a simplified form of West Irish dialect with its Tudor Vocabulary and Gaelic Syntax. However, soon realizing the limited scope and literary possibilities of using such a form and language, he decided to move on to other forms. He believed that the directness of his language must reproduce the actual experience and that form must reflect an emotional honesty and an immediacy which links the personal with the emotional. Within his own craft, he used the verse form deftly as a poetic device to pen some of the most acclaimed poems such as The Second Coming, A Prayer for my Daughter and the Byzantium poems, to name only a few. Thus Yeats revived and revitalized the dwindling verse form. In fact, he conceptualized the rejuvenation of the verse form much before Eliot and Pound began writing in this vein.

True to his vacillating self, Yeats soon abandoned the characteristic rhythm of the Renaissance to use a simplified ballad meter a form which he felt could express emotions and nationalistic fervour in the language of the common man. Thus we find this form amply exemplified in The Green Helmet and a blend of blank verse with lyric meters in his Dance plays (E&I 525). Like many of his predecessors such as William Morris, Rossetti and other Pre-Raphaelites, Yeats also drew inspiration from the medieval concept of balladry. He deftly used this form to strengthen his technical control on content, form, imagery and language. The ballad form was a natural and ideal instrument for celebration and vindication of heroic and nationalist fervour in Yeats' hands. His political ballads such as the casement ballads are an overt statement on moral standards. For instance, in a brief epigrammatic piece of fast
Yeats recaptured the anonymous tone of the balladist to suggest the moralizing nature of the Greek chorus in "What We Lost."

I sing what was lost, and dread what was won,
I walk in a battle fought over again,
My king lost king, and lost soldiers my men,  

Undoubtedly, Yeats’ growing stature as a literary figure and his maturing art made him mend his earlier philosophy and poetic beliefs. From subjective, personal and rather vague subjects, he consciously made a shift to appreciate objective and thought-provoking issues. His modified ideology is visible not only in his critical writings but also in his own works. Leaving behind the earlier remoteness, sloppiness and obscurity which now seemed rather "unnmanly," Yeats reshaped his poetic ideology concerning form and content. He accepted: "I have woven about me a web of thoughts. I wish to break through it, to see the world again" (L 58).

Thus Yeats deliberately worked towards a "search for a more of manful energy" and "clean outline" even in his critical writings. Troubled by financial and familial challenges, he found writing verse, with its demands on intellectual energy and excitement, very difficult, and therefore turned to writing articles. He enjoyed the position of superiority of the critic... (Ellmann, Mask 81) and revitalized his writings with a new, more invigorating and energetic perusal of form and content in literature. Criticism as a genre was cathartic for Yeats and never a substitute. In the five decades of his career as a critic, he remained associated with his literary and creative works and used them to complement each other.

In his review of Robert Buchanan’s The Wandering Jew in Bookman (April, 1893), Yeats recorded: "Great literature is always great because the writer was thinking of truth and life and beauty more than of literary form and literary fame" (UP I 266). His early poetry, marked with lyricism and romanticism, deftly explored a variety of subject matters in diverse forms. Going beyond the usual themes of human emotions and natural magnificence, Yeats explored the unusual subjects like mythology, occult, nationalism, folklores and magic to venture into a world of make-believe to escape from the harsh realities of life. Consequently, his poetics of early period is dramatic, dreamy, suggestive, personal yet evocative in content. Predominantly promoting the lyric form, he chose remote, unspecific and imaginative settings for his plays and poetry in a deliberate attempt to wander away from the real and the
conscious. With melancholy as its dominant mood, the emphasis was on escaping into an idyllic Arcadian world. Perturbed by the din and dazzle of the modern world, Yeats juxtaposed the artificiality and the ennui of the cities with the solace and tranquillity in the lap of Mother Nature. Poems like “The Lake Isle of Innisfree,” “The Song of the Happy Shepherd,” “The Stolen Child,” “The Man Who Went to Fairyland,” “The Wandering of Oisin” and “Sailing to Byzantium” present a strong urge to escape from the ruthlessness of the world into a land of fantastic idealism.

The content of Yeats’s body of thought is more symbolic than descriptive and exemplifies his unquenchable quest for meaning, integrity and unity in art and between life and art. His multifariousness found its profoundest expression in the mass of poetry he wrote on diverse yet timeless themes, for he was convinced that motifs, recurrent images and symbols had the potential to present ideas implicitly, subtly or even indirectly. He chose to perceive of form in terms of metaphors and images many a time sourced from his life indicative of growth in his prosody and poetics. The poetic effect of Yeats’s works is enhanced by his subtle use of functional imagery which underscores his sentiments on the issue in hand. He advocated pithy and precise imagery and was conscious of its functional effect as is apparent from his own poetry. He used his imagery as an effective medium to voice his thematic concerns and to construct art in terms of meaning or extra-formal values. The resultant imagery is intimately connected with the subject-matter of his works.

The content of Yeats’s poems is not confined to personal emotions only, rather they embody all-inclusive and universal themes and situations. For instance, the impatience and the vulnerability of the poet is very effectively rendered in the image of the dog raging to escape the tin-can or old-kettle tied to his tail, aptly symbolizing an aging poet. On another plain, the image of the Falcon and the Falconer in “The Second Coming” suggests breaking away from traditional ties while the images in “Sailing to Byzantium” depict an aged man is but a paltry thing and highlights how the young, unmindful of others, are engaged in sensuous pleasures. Similarly, the image “A tattered coat upon a stick” elucidates the theme of an old man growing physical impotence. Yeats used vivid, graphic and richly allusive metaphors to elucidate his poetics. Thus the dance imagery emerges as a conceptual metaphor to depict the underlying tension and to initiate reconciliation between man and the supernatural world and also between the warring humans.
Anticipating the immense possibility of lyric poetry, ballads and folk songs to express subjective emotions by setting them to music, Yeats discovered a subtle process of association of ideas through these forms. He found these forms to be congenial and exciting in the verbal qualities which made music a natural accompaniment and a medium which further enhanced the meaning and the effect of poetry. For Yeats, the poet's business was to 'sing' out his heart's desires and sentiments. The song, on the other hand, with its intrinsic implication of celebration of an emotion, an event or an imaginary situation had connotations linking form to content. Yeats used the metaphor of the song and the singer to underscore the vital relationship between many of his works, his views on the purpose and objective of a poet and his stature in society. He criticised Ibsen's *A Doll's House* for incorporating dialogue so close to modern speech that music and style were impossible (*E&I* 167). On the other hand, he extolled Coleridge and Rossetti for making what Arnold has called that 'morbid effort, that search for perfection of thought and feeling, and to unite this to perfection of form' (*Au* 188).

A unique feature of Yeats' poetic beliefs on form and content in literature rested on his insistence that ideally, the form should be simple and direct to enable the contents to forge a connection between the poet and the people. He regarded poetry as the appropriate medium or form to express the 'inherited subject matter.' His formidable learning, eclectic fanciful imagination and rather bizarre system of philosophy found expression in one form or the other. Parkinson in his book *W. B. Yeats: A Self Critic* avers: 'Yeats' poetic concern was with the universal thought, and only pragmatically with the temporal world; occult and Irish symbols were his instruments for evoking moods of permanent and universal value' (12). In a similar vein, Francis Bickley likens Yeats' mind to a country of delicately coloured clouds, of which the forms are beautiful but dissolve and change too quickly ever to be fully apprehended. Only now and again is an outline definite and stable enough for our own more solid minds to rest on (*qtd. in Pierce* I 285).

Inarguably, Yeats' notion of content was guided by the principle that one must write without care, and straight out of heart. A poet, he asserts, 'always speaks of his personal life, in his finest work out of its tragedy, whatever it be, remorse, lost love, or mere loneliness, he never speaks directly as to someone at the breakfast table. There is always a phantasmagoria' (*E&I* 509). Yeats believed that a poet must convert his personal experience into the themes
and the subject matter of his writings and recommended use of simple and passionate
dramatic speech thereby, obliterating the predilection for spontaneous lyricism.

In fact, Yeats found in Goethe's assertions an echo of the themes or the content of
poetry that he supported. In Eckermann's *Conversations with Goethe*, the latter had asserted
that he preferred personal experience to be the content of his poetry: "All my poems were
occasional poems, suggested by real life; I attach no value to poems snatched out of
air. Reality must give the motive, the points to be expressed—the kernel, but to work out of it
a beautiful animated whole, belongs to the poet" (Eckermann 8). Yeats also endorsed
Goethe's confession: "I have never uttered anything I have not experienced". I have only
composed love songs when I have loved. How could I write songs of hatred without hating?
(qtd. in Perloff 132). Thus inspired, Yeats imbibed the notion of personal emotion as
appropriate theme into his poetics. This belief was further reinforced by Yeats's father who
believed that poetry is at its best when "the wild spirit of your imagination is wedded to
concrete fact". It is easier to write poetry that is far away from life and comments on it but
it is infinitely more exciting to write the poetry of life (Au 281).

From simple direct and leisurely situations, devoid of much intricacy to rather
complex issues of juxtaposition of man against nature, the content of Yeats's works traverse
over a plethora of issues. During the first phase of his poetic sojourn which lasted till the end
of the century, his poems appeared as an oasis of solitude and leisure. Escaping from the
world of realities into an idyllic world, the lovers pine for what is not and sing songs of
weariness, waning of true love and parting of the lovers in poems such as "The Indian to His
love," and "The Falling of the Leaves." He also took to writing philosophical poems inspired
by Hindu Mythology but soon repudiated the path of sheer fantasy to follow his nationalist
agenda of writing for and about Ireland. This led him to write many Irish Ballads, a form
used by him to break free from personal poetry to celebrate and propagate his "lust and rage"
in a simple but potent form on issues which decimated the distance between the poet and the
audience. While using the typical feature of Ballad art, epic poetry and tragedy to
unequivocally extol the rich and noble past, Yeats also altered the age-old dictum of
traditional ballad form of never moralizing. Thus he celebrates the hero of 1916 Easter Rising
in "O'Rahilly," thus:
Sing of the ÓRahilly
Do not deny his right
Sing a Ítheò before his name;
Allow that he, despite
All that learned historians,
Established it for good;
He wrote out that word himself
He cherished himself with blood. (CW I 307-8)

Apart from writing ballads on Cromwell and ÓRahilly, Yeats also wrote "Come Gather Round Me, Parnellites" to vindicate Parnell’s reputation. Besides, the ballad on ÓRahilly, while eulogizing him, also elucidates a peculiar feature of heroic ballad—its essential purpose of recording tragedy. Thus Yeats used the ballad as a form to join the singer and the audience in praise of the proud hero who embodies the vision of the community, people or nation and who faces tragedy with equanimity. However, it is not merely the nationalist agenda that Yeats tried to propagate through the Ballad form, he also used it as a medium to reach out to common man through lucid, clear diction and content with which they too could identify.

During the second phase of his literary and critical development, his growing involvement with the nationalist theatre for Ireland and his association with the nationalist freedom movement brought about a paradigm shift not only in his writing techniques and choice of forms but also in the content of his works. Graduating from the personal and romantic themes on having loved and lost, he began to concentrate on the problems and issues of the Irish people, their beliefs and sentiments. Contextualizing the glorious myths and legends of the Celtic world to the contemporary times, he synthesized both the worlds to his advantage. Thus by the time the Easter Rising took place in 1916, he had turned to writing about the historic event in a celebratory tenor, drawing his figures not from Irish myths and folklores but from comparatively recent past, his friends and family:

I have seen them coming at the close of the day
Coming with vivid faces...
From counter and desk among grey....
A terrible beauty is born. (SP 95)
The predominant lyric element of his earlier poetry also gave way to a more dramatic form in *The Green Helmet*. Like Donne, Yeats adopted colloquial and conversational tone as in ‘No Second Troy’:

Why should I blame her that she filled my days
With misery... (SP 45)

Thus the poems in his collection *The Green Helmet* and other succeeding collections are more dramatic. Widening his scope of his subjects and content, Yeats included ironic commentary on contemporary issues in *Responsibilities* while in *The Green Helmet*, he expressed his bitterness and disillusionment at his failure in both personal and political missions. In ‘Adam’s Curse’, for instance, he took up a common concern for all writers when he conceded in simple language ‘a line may take us hours may be, yet if it does not seem a moment’s thought our stitching and unstitching has been naught’ (*CW* 178).

The third phase of Yeats’ ingenuity as a critic of life and literature spanning from 1917 to 1923 is often referred to as a ‘phase of Reconciliation’. This phase was marked by profound mystical, philosophical and poetic creative accomplishment. He finalized the first part of *A Vision* which incorporated a complex blend of mythology, cosmology, historiography and psychology, but also wrote some of the most outstanding poetic pieces. These included didactic poems like ‘The Phrases of the Moon’ and apocalyptic poems like ‘The Second Coming’. The shift of content from the dreams of fairyland or a celebration of a friend or foe in Ireland to more contemporary or universal issues is apparent from some of his most famous poems written during the period such as ‘Easter 1916’, ‘The Second Coming’, ‘A Prayer for my Daughter’ and ‘Sailing to Byzantium’. Thus if ‘Easter 1916’ salutes the heroism of the martyrs of the Easter Rising, ‘The Second Coming’ presents a rather disillusioned picture of the world where man has broken away from the traditional values and where:

The Best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.  (SP 99)
The last phase of his creativity was replete with crude and violent language exhibiting the harsh realities of life. Torn between declining physical health due to old age and still vivid imaginative power, the poet struggled to come to terms with the inevitable reality. Thus his later poetry presents Yeats' antithetical approach to life in general and his own decaying body in particular. While bemoaning the decay in the Irish politics, monarchy, modern art and civilization itself, he rejoiced in the pleasures of nature, art, dance and sensuousness. In fact, there is an element of tragic joy in the themes of the last poems such as *Lapis Lazuli*, *Among School Children* and *Sailing to Byzantium*. The theme of man's quest for ideal life, the spectacle of decay in the world of men and love in all its shades find ample space in his later poetry as well. Thus unrequited love of Maud Gonne remains the theme of many of his poems. The transformation in her character and ideology provides the poet an occasion for philosophic musings on man's predicament in a world of flux as in *Among School Children*.

Perceiving literature as an embodiment and expression of one's deepest emotions and experiences, Yeats used it to amplify his concerns on myriad issues culled from his own experiences and observations. Consequently, despair in old age, the defiant admiration for the ancestors and the tradition, the reminiscence of the past glory and the contempt for the present times remain central to his writings. A persistent theme in Yeats' poetry is that of death and old age, the latter often being depicted using the imagery of a scarecrow. Hence in *Among School Children*, Yeats reposes his deep concern for decay and looming danger of death in old age at both spiritual and physical level. *Sailing to Byzantium*, likewise, juxtaposes the exuberance of youth with the alienation and infirmity in old age:

That is no country for old men. The young
In each other's arms, birds in the trees
-those dying generations at their song,  (SP 104)

Concomitantly, the search for eternity and intransience amidst the chaotic and inconsistent chimera of this world marked with mental and spiritual decadence occurs especially in Yeats' poetry. While T. S. Eliot mulled over the sombre auguries of an impoverished wasteland, marred by materialism, violence and ennui in relationships, Yeats contemplated over the fate of the world in the face of great gloom lurching menacingly over the modern times. For instance, the growing murderousness of the world symbolically depicted by the mythical embodiment of an archetypal power is explicitly delineated by *The
Second Coming. The theme of spiritual renewal, a subject close to Yeats’ heart is embodied in “Prayer for My Daughter” and “Sailing to Byzantium.” On another plane, the theme of disintegration, chaos, sudden change and the inevitability of annihilation and the imminent disaster finds manifestation in poems like “September 1913,” “Wild Swans at Coole Park,” “An Irish Airman Foresees His Death,” and “Easter 1916.” Thus his poetry becomes a vehicle of his critique of the modern times and not merely the modern literature. His earlier perception of the change he notices in “The Wild Swans At Coole” have looked upon those brilliant creatures./And now my heart is sore./All’s changed since. leads to a rather fretful and desperate conclusion in “Easter 1916,” wherein he laments:

All changed, changed utterly
A terrible beauty is born. (SP 93)

And ultimately to a disturbing conclusion about the situation in the world in “The Second Coming”:

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world, (SP 99)

Another dimension to Yeats’ perception of content and form is his meditations on art. Primarily perceiving great art as emblematic of the relationship between man and the collective memory, Yeats believed that art attains greatness only when it addresses hopes and alarms common to every man that ever came into the world (E&I 301-2). Art, for Yeats, was an embodiment of the soul. Hence he celebrated the spirit of dignity and immortality of the soul and the transitory nature of man’s worth in this world. Like Plotinus, he too believed that man was destined to play a part as on stage in his lifetime and the transposing of the process from one life to another. Thus Yeats’ critical credo conceived of the unification of varied art forms through the similitude of the content. Analogous to this was his appreciation of qualities such as dignity and stoicism in the face of adversity of his friends, contemporaries and Irish revolutionaries whom he enumerated in poems like “Lapis Lazuli.”

Moreover, a long drawn association and allegiance to Ireland prompted Yeats to immortalize Ireland by not only locating his poems against the backdrop of Irish landscape but also by memorializing people and events. He portrayed the national culture and art, the political instability, World War I, the Easter Rebellion, the Irish civil war, and the Easter
Uprising in his works. His poems such as Easter 1916, September 1913, and To a Shade are placed in the Irish context. The dream of returning to Sligo and its serene surroundings or that islet [innisfree] recurs as a theme in many of Yeats' poems as also in his novel John Sherman. The Stolen Child (1886), To an Isle in the Water (1889), and The White birds have in common with the poem The Man who Dreamed of Fairyland (1891) the yearning for a world forgotten isle (47). Sailing to Byzantium and The Shadowy Water further expand this theme of escapism to include a break away from the shackles of time. In fact, Yeats had conceded during the last year of his life that it was primarily the antiquated stuff out of his mythology that constituted his themes. He believed that a true artist must celebrate traditional sanctity. To the young writers, Yeats' clarion call was:

Absorb Ireland and her tragedy and you will be the people, perhaps the poet of a new insurrection. (L 294)

Within his poetry, the theme of ruthlessness of time recurs, for Yeats believes that man has no enemy but time (Dear Shadows). In Broken Dreams, Yeats highlights how Maud Gonne's beauty has withered with time but this remorse is soon eliminated by exultation in the belief that hope sustains in the other worldliness and that beauty and appeal will be restored to Maud Gonne. The stripping of beauty by the vagaries of time, leaving women withered old and skeleton gaunt recurs in other poems as well.

Analogous to creating penetrating and thought provoking works by choosing content with which the audience and the reader could relate to, selection of apposite form was also a great challenge for Yeats. He strove hard to choose befitting form to elucidate his themes and content whether in prose, plays or lyrics. Initially, the dawning of the realization that poetry could have no other vocation than expressing beauty in different forms determined his choice of natural beauty of Ireland and the rural locales as compared to the unnerving materialistic urban setup. But soon realizing his short sightedness in restricting the content of literature to a specific landscape and peculiar theme, Yeats repudiated Art for Art's sake theory to adopt his own premise that literature must be the expression of conviction and be the garment of noble emotion and not an end in itself (qtd. in Ellmann, Mask 145). Consequently, he began to endorse that literature which could reflect emotional honesty and an immediacy which links the personal with the emotional. In his own literary output, a similitude of this notion
can be discerned, for Yeats reproduces the actual experience, spiced up with his imagination and vision, present universal emotions too encased in the directness of his language.

A keen interest in the practical, speculative and experimental aspects of magic led Yeats to regard it also as a unique art form. Besotted with the mystic depths of Irish mythology and the life beyond, he genuinely believed in the world of spirits and felt a definite pull towards it which he recaptured in his own characteristic manner as the content of many of his poems. Thus many of his works especially his early poems such as The Stolen Child, dealt with magic, occult and man equation with the supernatural. Yeats' lifelong interest in the mystics and occult continued to inspire the content of much of his writings, despite any worthwhile revelation of occult wisdom. Enthused with the typically Romantic spirit, the quest for the secret knowledge of the self remained a paramount concern for Yeats. He believed that such knowledge would be revealed through a visionary image. In fact, he construed Shelley to be thus inspired by a single vision that would have come to him again and again (E&I 94).

A perusal of the content of Yeats' poems and plays clearly indicate the subservience of form to the content. Unlike the moderns who deliberately disintegrated the form to experiment with literary devices in order to make literature more complex and difficult, Yeats continued to be traditional in form. Vitriolic in his attack on the Victorian and Modern literature, Yeats asserted that he hated the literature of point of view. Rebuffing the Modernists' attempt at disassociating with the rich past, nature and personal emotions, he posited that the content of literature must return to the ways of our fathers, a casting out of the description of nature for the sake of nature, of the moral law for the sake of moral law, a casting out of all anecdotes and of that brooding over scientific opinion that so often extinguished the central flame in Tennysoné in others (E&I 163). He was certain that with this change of substance, this return to imagination, would come a change of style (163) and consequently in the content. In A General Introduction for my Work, Yeats conceded to not only rectifying, under the tutelage of John O'Leary, his defects as a poet such as writing about vague and incoherent subject matters, he also admits to reading only romantic literature and hating that dry eighteen century rhetoric (E&I 510).

Poetry as a subject also emerges in many of Yeats' poems so does the subject of poetry repeating old themes. However, Yeats credits the poet for his ability to skilfully revitalize, and rejuvenate old themes by insinuating fresh ideas and perspective, thereby
recreating and enriching the tradition. In "The Circus Animals' Desertion," he muses: "What can I but enumerate old themes." The inextricable correlation of the process and product of artistic creation is also taken up by Yeats in many of his poems. Thus if "All things can Tempt Me" and "The Fascination of What's Difficult" are about the distractions to him as an artist, the reaction of the audience to his craft is captured in the poems such as "The Fisherman" and "The People," and his internal dilemma in "The Dialogue of Self and Soul," while Byzantium poems have for their content the finished product of creation as one of the connotations. At times, he vents out his despair at the changing perception and reception of art, viz a viz his own personal art form and the general trends prevalent in his times. Concomitantly, "Adam's Curse" throws valuable insight into a poet's artistic methods which involves a lot of hidden arduous labour:

I said, A line will take us hours maybe;
Yet if it does not seem a moment's thought,
Our stitching and unstitching has been naught. (CW I 80)

Similarly the tranquillity and radiance of natural beauty fascinated Yeats. He contrasted the serenity of countryside living with the sombre monotony and insipid existence of the city life. Consequently, Innisfree is the idyllic land where he hears "lake water lapping, with low sounds by the shore." The incessant quest for truth whether through the medium of reason, emotions, and imagination or even at the expense of sanity is also vital to Yeats' poetics. He may arrive at the truth intuitively as in "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" or it may dawn upon him through imaginative or philosophical musing as in the poem "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death."

Exploring the dramatic genre to delineate, objectify and contextualize his Irish preoccupation, Yeats fancied characters and themes of Irish origin. Thus within his poetic oeuvre, he took up characters from diverse ages to elucidate his point of view. Hence if Cuchulain, the defiant warrior, emblemized the mythological part of Ireland; Swift, Burke and Burkeley emerged as the Anglo-Irish ideals from the 18th century while O'Leary, Parnell and O'Higgins were his heroes from the modern Ireland. Thus within their socio-historical and critical contexts, Yeats' plays are based on content and themes from peasantry, mythology, and Irish history and customs. He romanticized the past while totally rejecting realism or contemporary issues which plague mankind. His pride in the rich heroic Irish
heritage was more pronounced in his early plays like *Cathleen Ni Houlihan, On Baillie’s Strand, The King’s Threshold* and *Deirdre* while in his later plays, he imbibed the socio-critical critiques of materialism, morality and philistinism as their themes. Moreover, the early determinism gave way to pessimism in his later plays.

Despite his penchant for Irish themes and content for his dramas, Yeats was also aware of the fact that such antiquated stuff out of mythology was responsible for his failure as a dramatist. Concurrent with his vision of a nationalist ideology was his vision of a model and ideal Irish society which would be primitive, rural, Celtic and based primarily on peasantry. Convinced that the avowed task of an artist is to celebrate *traditional sanctity*, he also realized that it was a challenge to make modern language an apt vehicle to express these antiquated themes. In *A General Introduction for My Work*, Yeats unravels the method behind his craft by conceding that most of the content of his works was based on Irish literature, past and present and was directed towards its futuristic plans. However, at the same time, he did not repudiate the role of the English Theatre in providing him with the vital content of his writings-prose, poetry or drama. He asserted: *Everything I love has come to me through English, Gaelic is my national language but it is not my mother tongue* (E&I 519). Elucidating certain influences, he further admits: *I owe my soul to Shakespeare, to Spender and to Blake, perhaps to William Morris and to the English language in which I think, speak and write* (519).

Hence the variety of themes which are embodied most profoundly in Yeats’ works while elucidating his multifariousness also hint at the variety of subjects open to an artist for investigation and exploration. It also underscores the intrinsic inter-relatedness and hence the indivisibility of form and content into two separate entities without distorting the fiber of the work. Yeats’ assumptions and contentions regarding form and content mesmerize us with their deliberate uncertainty, for he does not explicitly expound his theory on these. To construct the frame works of his critical ideology, his collective works have to be analysed to establish his ideology. Trust in the belief that it is our instinct or our intellect that makes the choices, led Yeats to conclude that a writer must be left completely free to follow his own instinct to choose his content although, paradoxically, he himself did not enjoy this freedom. Interestingly, Yeats neither searched for nor conformed to any aesthetic formalism.

Highly motivated by the Pre-Raphaelites and the Romantics, initially Yeats had advocated writing on content which depicted beauty in its myriad manifestations. In a letter
to Katherine Tynan, he had conceded, "In my heart I thought that only beautiful things should be painted, and that only ancient things and the stuff of dreams is beautiful." (L 123). Artistically inclined towards unrealistic art, he deemed that sordid and contemporary content as inappropriate to art. Interestingly though he had begun to promote and vouch for "directness and extreme simplicity" (L 30) in form and content in literature, holding these two to be the aim of literature, his own craft apparently defied this dictum. This realization also brought to his notice the fact that his own early poetry lacked fundamental thinking and had hence become sentimental from lack of thought.

Apparently, the writing of the novel John Sherman on a contemporary issue exhibits his gradual movement towards imbibing certain traits of the modernists. The novel's thematic focus lay in juxtaposing present with past and future, and is far removed from the usual Gaelic, heroic or romanticised themes of Irish folklores which Yeats presented in his writings. His visualization of the apocalyptic future, his exploration of his relationship with Maud Gonne, his lament at the loss of life during the Nationalist movement of Ireland or his regret at the fate of Gore Booth sisters all have some correlation with the theme of the progression and dependence on time.

From Yeats' critical matrix, it is apparent that as far as content is concerned, he did not favour the writing of sentimental poetry or literature only. When he claimed that he, too, tried to get rid of modern subjectivity, his allusion was clearly to the Pre-Raphaelite poetry which was more often than not marred by overindulgence in lilting, mournful laments of a lover against the alleged atrocities of his beloved. He also chastised the Rhymers' club poets for their intemperance in personal emotions and for exhibiting "conscious deliberate craft" (Au 318). However, Yeats' critical theory incorporated the idea of the resolution of the polarities between the instinctive self and the external world. Consequently, he approved of the apocalyptic poetry of Eliot and explored the same in his poetry, although from a different perspective. As against Eliot's vision of the contemporary world as corrupted by man's repudiation of God, moral and emotional barrenness and an all-pervasive decadence of civilization, leading to internal and spiritual devastation, Yeats held the extraneous forces responsible for man's victimization. Nevertheless, he found fault with the content of the modern poetry. He essentially disliked the certainty and definiteness of the modern objective poetry because it deprived the content of the subtle suggestiveness and imaginative connotations which the unconsciously directed symbols lend to literature. Yeats also believed
that the purpose of literature and all other art forms is not to give explanations or to become didactic. To him, its motive is to suggest and not to pronounce judgments.

Concomitantly, he felt that the modernist approach to literature which thrived on subverting the prevailing conventions by breaking up the narrative into fragments or disrupting the syntax through the use of such modes as Stream of Consciousness were detrimental to the form and content of literature. He castigated the modernists for their mutation of form and preference for only the objective content in literature, rather than the personal which the Romantics depicted. For this very reason, he was critical of Pound’s craft for being “constantly interrupted, broken, twisted into nothing by its direct opposite, nervous obsession, nightmarish stammering confusion” (OBMV XXIV). Perceiving a similar “exquisite or grotesque fragments” in his Cantos, Yeats asks rhetorically:

Can impressions that are in part visual, in part metrical be related like the notes of a symphony: has the author been carried beyond reason by a theoretical conception? (XXIV)

In fact, Yeats found in Pound a similitude of “that lack of form and consequent obscurity which is the main defect of Auden, Day Lewis and their School” (XXIV). Conversely, he thought that the content of most of the modernists such as Pound, Eliot and Auden was replete with the trivialities, flux, and dramatic fragmentation. Their rejection of the Romantic concept of poetry as lyrical, simple and beautiful, and their constant experimentation with verse forms to make them suitable to depict political turmoil and humanistic content perplexed Yeats. He even censured the Modernists for their lack of personal experience in their works. However, anxious to evolve with the changing times, Yeats accepted the change in content as per the changing sensibilities of the contemporary world. In fact, he ascribed to the poet the power of transformation of experience into a composition, with the conviction that a poet is “more type than man, more passion than type” (Donogue15).

Unlike T. S. Eliot, Yeats did not believe in separating the man who suffers from the man who creates. The element of experience led to his preference for autobiographical poetry which is abundantly found in his own poetic proclivity. Also to him, “language, colour, form and religious and civil habits of action are all the instruments and materials of poetry” (E&I 67). Since Yeats believed that “we can know nothing that we have not made”, his general
reflections and critique on form and content depended largely on his own literary canon and cannot be treated in isolation. Ellmann also endorses this view of the inter-connectivity of Yeats' works:

Every poem embodies a schematization, conscious as well as unconscious, of his way of living and seeing, and all his poems form a larger scheme which we can watch in the process of evolving. (Ellmann, Continuity 92)

Besides, for Yeats, the value of art lay partially in the ethical, social and moral concerns embodied in its content, and reflected through the work. He also tried to discern how the co-relation between the artist and the public could be established through these elements. Thus if the theme of love and loss recurs in the hauntingly lyrical mode against the Gaelic backdrop in Countess Cathleen, The Death of Cuchulain and Deidre or The Wanderings of Oisin, the dance and the dancer emblemize the bond between art and the transcendental world in Four plays for the Dancers and Among School Children. However, he did not recommend revelling only in the past grandeur, rather preferring to conjoin realism with transcendental vision in poems such as The Stolen Child, The Man who Dreamt of Faeryland or The Moods. In fact, Rosenthal posits: A clear bohemian current, in the Romantic anti-Bourgeois, half anarchist sense, runs through Yeats' early plays and never quite disappears (53).

Moreover, Yeats advocated forging of a relationship between the individual and the collective conscience. To elucidate any theme, he found it imperative to use images and symbols which had the potential of expressing what could not be otherwise said in simple straightforward manner. Even the relationships between the text, the actors and the scenery, through subtle images and symbols were redefined by Yeats to corroborate with the content to unify disparate elements. Typically, Yeats preferred to practice rather than only theorize; hence he exemplified his poetic beliefs through his own works. In the introduction to The Oxford Book of Modern Verse, Yeats sums up his response to the contemporary content of literature thus:

It has sometimes seemed of late years ---as if the poet could at any moment write a poem by recording the fortuitous scene or thought, perhaps it might be enough to put into some fashionable rhythm: I am sitting in a chair, there are three dead flies on a corner of the ceiling. (OBMV xxvii-xxviii)
Indubitably, with in Yeats\' critical method, the content was equally as important as the form and he had no patience for those writers who ignored the former to give significance to the latter. He realized that form exists in duality both as an independent entity, and as related to content which is not formless. Consequently, the interpenetration and indissolubility of form and content cannot be refuted. Thus if form is a matter of words; content is a matter of concepts signified by words. And if diction, syntax, versification and imagery are the four elements of form, content entails what is said- the plot, character, setting, thought argument or theme. Having realized this, he was critical of those who overlooked content to give prominence to form. In this context, he observes: "I have been put into a rage by the followers of Huxley, Tyndall, Carolus Duran and Bastein-Lepage, who not only asserted the unimportance of the subject matter in art or literature, but the independence of the arts from one another and further adds: \"I delighted in every age where poet and artist confined themselves gladly to some inherited subject matter known to the whole people for I thought that in man and race alike there is something called 'Unity of Being' \" (LDW x).

Undoubtedly, Yeats conceived of a complex heterogeneous literary doctrine which subscribed to diverse and assorted themes within the fibre of a single poem or play. Although he explored diverse forms and themes which formed the content of his literary and critical oeuvre, he did not subscribe to the notion of the sufficiency or appropriateness of any particular literary form or poetic language for a particular content. Moreover, a study of the choice of form and content especially in his later poetry underlines Yeats' commitment and allegiance to Romanticism. Adhering to his Romantic moorings, as a critic and poet, he avidly opposed realism. Hence instead of contemporary realistic issues, he preferred romanticizing life and situations through imagination and symbolism. The modernist's insistence on art as a representation of reality was countered by his assertion that art creates and not merely reflects reality. Hence he saw imagination as an essential tool for any writer. Against the rising tide of realism, political verse and the popularity of the University Wits, Yeats upheld the 'innocent and the beautiful, the traditional and the noble' as suitable content of his poetry (LDW x). In this regard, George Bornstein avers:

The Romantic themes embodied in his later poems were in keeping with the genre of Greater Romantic Lyric- the out-in-out process described by M.H. Abrahms- which had first been popularized in the conversation poems of Bowles, Wordsworth and
Coleridge, in which the meditating poet moves from a landscape to his own thoughts and then back to a landscape. (Bornstein 50)

Moreover, Yeats’ conviction that literature and especially poetry should be an expression of the spiritual life of an individual established his allegiance to the Romantics rather than the Moderns. In fact, his continued dedication to the laws of imagination and art for spiritual growth began to find favour with many modernists as well. Yeats could never approve of the modernist penchant for logic over emotions, as also manipulation of form and predominance of form over content. Since modernism was marked with the realization that language was incapable of fully communicating meaning, the modernists recommended the pre-eminence of form and down played the importance of content. Nevertheless, Yeats never ascribed to this notion and appears to give prominence to both form and content in his poetic beliefs. In fact it can be said with conviction that Yeats exhibits protean sensibility which honoured the indivisibility and indistinguishably of form and content in literature.