

THE SHAPING FACTORS

They who shape me, shape my art.

(James Shirley: *Kinship*: 1992 : 43)

A.N. Jeffares made an illuminating study on Yeats, the man and poet. He traced the poet's family as far back as the early 18th century to Jervis Yeats, the whole-sale-linen merchant, perhaps from Yorkshire, but settled in New Roe. Through successive generations their link with the Wichens, the Butlers, Taylors, Corbets, Pollexfens and Middletons was established. The family tree and the influences that shaped the poet, can be traced from Joseph Hone's biography, but the most authentic source is Yeats's *Autobiographies*. In this chapter we intend to emphasize the distinct Irishness of the poet's background which intuitively provided Yeats a stimulus to plunge deep into his Irish roots.

William Butler Yeats, the eldest son of John and Susan Yeats, was born on June 13, 1865 at "Georgeville" in Sandymount, Dublin. He was haunted

By childish memories of an old cross Pollexfen,
And of a Middleton, whose name you never heard,
And of a red-haired Yeats whose looks, although he died
Before my time, seem like a vivid memory.

(Yeats: 1993 : 202)

The poor and imaginative Yeatses had little concern with worldly

affairs. The Pollexfens were aristocratic, supercilious and active. The Middletons were close to the country folk, having interest in eerie spirits and legends. These were the relations among whom the poet grew up. The "half legendary" ancestors partly explain the curious ambivalence in his personality. They not only root him to the soil of Ireland, but also act as ready resources for his poetry.

The Pollexfen family, marked by the "strain of depressive melancholia" (Murphy: 1971 : 34), was renowned in Ireland. His grandfather William Pollexfen, the "silent and fierce old man" (Yeats: 1993 : 113), had a great influence on the poet in his childhood. The fierce, blue-eyed, bearded grandfather who "laid his strong bones down in death" (176) by his wife, Elizabeth's side in the "grey stone tomb" in St. John's Churchyard, became an image in Yeats's later poems. George Pollexfen, the astrologer uncle, was a close confidant. It was with him at Rosses Point that the poet first became sensitive to the Kabbalistic symbols. Yeats would walk on the seashore, George on a cliff or sandhill. Without speaking Yeats would "imagine the symbol, and he would notice what passed before his mind's eye and in a short time he would practically never fail of the appropriate vision" (Yeats: 1956 : 320). Mary Battle, the uncle's old servant, would be in bed but "her dream echoed" (321) their vision. After the uncle's death in 1910, Yeats reminisced in 1915 how the formal and grand funeral was attended by many Masons who

... *drove from miles away*
To scatter the Acacia spray

Upon a melancholy man

Who had ended where his breath began.

(1993 : 176)

The excellent rider was commemorated in 1918 :

And then I think of old George Pollexfen

In muscular youth well known to Mayo men

For horsemanship at meets or at racecourses,

That could have shown how pure-bred horses

And solid men, for all their passion, live

But as the outrageous stars incline

By opposition, square and trine;

Having grown sluggish and contemplative.

(149)

John Pollexfen, the sailor "lost" at sea, and Alfred Pollexfen who came back from Liverpool to Sligo in 1906 complete the Pollexfen list in Yeats's poetry.

Among the Yeatses, the poet remembered the gentle Rev. John Yeats, the "old country scholar, Robert Emmet's friend" (113), rector of Drumcliff which was a parish at the foot of Ben Bulbin. His son,

That red-headed rector in County Down,

A good man on his horse, (370)

was related to the "Sandymount Corbets" through marriage. They were "Butlers far back", for John Yeats's mother was the daughter of John Butler, chief clerk in the war office at Dublin Castle.

It was through the Middletons that Yeats developed an interest in country stories, and this interest persisted throughout his poetic career. He spent his childhood in Ireland and England. The place that affected him the most was Sligo.

His father's nationalist ideas touched him much. J.B. Yeats was "not only a rare portrait painter, but a vehement eloquent Irishman, hot on politics" (Rhys : 1935 : 98). He introduced his son to the Contemporary Club which met at Trinity College. Hubert Oldham, the founder of the Club, had an interest in Home Rule. Yeats met many men with strong nationalist feeling. Ideas of Home Rule were instilled into his son by J.B. Yeats. However, Yeats turned from ideas of Home Rule to more absolute nationalism when he came in contact with John O' Leary. His father was instrumental in formulating the poet's view on poetry and aesthetics.

Yeats began his poetic career with the woods of Arcady and a little Indian temple in the Golden Age. His shift to Ireland was quick and deliberate. He admitted: "... from the moment I began *The Wanderings of Oisín* ... my subject matter became Irish" (1993 : 523). He convinced himself that he should never "go for the scenery of a poem to any country but" his "own" (1908 : 44).

This decision is usually attributed to the influence of John O' Leary. The Fenian leader exerted one of the most powerful influences upon the poet. Born in Tipperary in 1830, O' Leary studied law briefly at Trinity College, Dublin. Then he spent some time

studying medicine, but it was his role in the struggle for Irish independence that stirred Yeats. O' Leary took charge of the finances of the Irish Revolutionary Brotherhood within a few months of its inception in 1858. The idea of national liberation goaded him to edit the *Irish People* which openly advocated the overthrow of the British. He was arrested as part of a suspected conspiracy involving insurrection, and was tried on a charge of treason. Eventually he was sentenced to twenty years penal servitude. As a part of general amnesty he was set free after five years, but was not permitted to return to Ireland until 1885. He spent his exile mainly in Paris. On his return to Ireland he settled in Dublin. O' Leary was respected by all parties and by a group of young writers who gathered around him. He encouraged Yeats, Katharine Tynan, Douglas Hyde and his other disciples to borrow his books on Irish subjects, the works of the nationalist poets like Davis, Callanan, Mangan and others. The conversations with O' Leary, the debates and discussions on the Irish poet-revolutionaries of the past moulded Yeats's poetic imagination.

O' Leary helped the young aspiring writers to finance and publish a book, *Poems and Ballads of Young Ireland*, which suggested a continuity between the efforts of the young poets and those of the olden days. He also printed their contributions regularly in a small weekly review called the *Gael*. Useful suggestions as to what should be included, were provided when Yeats began to edit Irish books like *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*, *Stories from Carleton* and



Representative Irish Tales.

Two speeches of the Fenian leader had a great impact on Yeats. In "How Irishmen Should Feel", O' Leary declared that he should feel first of all that he was an Irishman. Secondly, that Irish unity must be secured. Finally, he should make some sacrifices for Ireland. These simple, unpolitical precepts, with O' Leary's moral force and revolutionary record behind them, had considerable effect upon Yeats, who upto that time had thought of the "national movement as an affair for politicians" (Ellmann: 1948 : 46). "What Irishmen should know" was the second speech. He advised Yeats to read "Eugene O' Curry on the ancient Celts" (Costollo: 1977 : 22).

Under O' Leary's inspiration, Yeats founded the Irish Literary Society (1891) in London and the Irish National Literary Society (1892) in Dublin. Literary activities of the Young Ireland Society were summed up by Yeats : "We had no Gaelic but paid great honour to the Irish poets who wrote in English" (1924 : 03). It was to the Fenian leader that Yeats owed his knowledge of Irish patriotic literature. O' Leary saw the function of the poet chiefly as patriotic. He believed that the poets born in Ireland should essentially be Irish poets and their task should be to develop the spirit of the nation. Yeats agreed that poetry should serve this function. He devoted himself to the task of recreating the past of Ireland. Moreover, the Victorian tendency to set poems in far-flung regions had become trite and was replaced by the introduction of familiar scenes. Yeats altered a few of his earlier works. In 1886 *Mosada* spoke of a "Russian Tale" and mentioned "a saint of

Russia". By 1889 they were substituted by an "Irish tale" and "a saint of Munster" respectively. Katharine Tynan was asked to review *John Sherman*. Yeats said, "I have an ambition to be taken as an Irish novelist, not as an English or cosmopolitan one, choosing Ireland as a background. I studied my characters in Ireland and described a typical Irish feeling in Sherman's devotion to Ballagh." (Tynan: 1916: 67). This tendency to "call the Muses home" was evident even in the poems.

O' Leary was a man devoted to the romantic concept of nationalism. Yeats found in him the inspiring idealism and the positive patriotism that he himself sought. He acknowledged his debt. "It is through the old Fenian leader John O' Leary I found my theme", he said (1961 : 510).

Charles Stewart Parnell was a powerful figure in Irish political life from 1879 to 1890. He was the national leader whose interest in Irish politics had been roused by the execution of the "Manchester Martyrs" in 1867. Leader of the Home Rule Party and the Irish National Land league, he used agrarian agitation to consolidate his power and exert pressure upon the British Government. He initiated the "National League" which put self government before land reform. In 1887 *The Times* published a series of articles entitled *Parnellism and Crime*, which implicated him in acts of violence. Investigations proved his innocence. Parnell was exonerated and his reputation soared in England and Ireland. His career was ruined when he was cited as co-

respondent in a divorce case. The scandal turned the Irish Catholics against him and brought about a split in the nationalist camp. J.B. Yeats disliked Parnell; O' Leary's group suspected him for his endorsement of the Land League and subsequent withdrawal; Katharine Tynan applauded him. The different opinions were known to Yeats who saw Parnell's struggle as a confrontation between single-minded integrity and compromising populist politics. This view gradually became a myth. Parnell became an ideal. He represented the proud, lonely Anglo-Irish leader who stood against all that Yeats despised in Irish politics and character.

The fall of Parnell forced Irishmen, confronted with rival nationalist parties, to question as to what constituted their essential Irish character. National identity had been defined in political terms in the 1880s. After Parnell, amid the wreckage of the political movement, it seemed that the cultural dimension might be more profound and significant. Yeats had "the sudden certainty that Ireland was to be like soft wax for years to come" (1956 : 245). Literary societies and publishing enterprises were started in order to mould public opinion. Since it was a tenet of Parnell's last campaign that his faction, and not the Mc Carthyites, were the "true" guardians of Ireland's separate political identity, the Parnellite press was eager to support an independent literary movement. Yeats found allies among the journalists who were associated with both the *United Ireland* and the *Irish Daily Independent*. In 1898 when Yeats became President of the Wolfe Tone Memorial Association, he tried to unite

the different parties in Ireland, the Parnellites, the anti-Parnellites, the official Unionists and the new party of progressive land-lords headed by Lord Castletown. Yeats was attracted to Parnell for his life-long devotion to the Irish national cause and for the unique loneliness in his character. His fall signified the hatred of mean minds for a superior one. Yeats expressed his view in "Parnell's Funeral", a bitter political poem. During the quarrel over Parnell's grave a quotation from Goethe ran through the papers, describing Irish jealousy: "The Irish seem to me like a pack of hounds, always dragging down some noble stag" (Yeats: 1956 : 316). This disturbed Yeats for he regarded Parnell as the Irish hero.

Yeats had faith neither in science nor in religion. He searched for a system that was ritualistic and spectacular, mythological and symbolic, one that could satisfy his curiosity about God and soul, death and immortality, life in this world and the one beyond the senses. Moving away from orthodox Christianity, he groped into the half-dark and mysterious realms of the Kabbala, Rosicrucianism, Alchemy, Hermetics and magic to solve the problems that arose in his mind. He said,

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

(1961 : 85)

Yeats deliberately studied the occult. There was hardly any phase in his long literary career which was free from the influence of the occult altogether. He busied himself seriously and laboriously for twenty years of his life, formulating his experiences and ideas of the occult into a "system". He gave it a final shape in *A Vision* and proclaimed it "a new divinity".

At the Metropolitan School of Art in Kildare Street, Dublin Yeats met George Russel, "A.E., the poet and mystic" (1956 : 80). A.E. did not paint the model as others tried to, "for some other image rose always before his eyes" (80), and he spoke to Yeats of his visions. This gift for vision impressed the poet. With the help of Charles Johnston and George Russell, Yeats founded the "Dublin Hermetic Society" (1885). In May 1887, Yeats called on Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, founder of the Theosophic Movement, in London. He was admitted to the London Theosophical Society and joined its Esoteric section in 1888. In 1890 he was asked to resign as he constantly insisted on evidence and experiment. He joined the Order of the Golden Dawn in 1890. It was a society dedicated to the study of Rosicrucianism and ritual magic. The dominant figure in this organization was Mac-Gregor Mathers, a staunch Celt of romantic personality, deeply read in the secret lore of the Kabbala. The author of *The Kabbala Unveiled* convinced Yeats that images welled up before the mind's eye from a deeper source than merely conscious or sub-conscious memory. This affirmed Yeats's belief in the "anima mundi", a concept that influenced much of his thinking on art and

philosophy. The symbols used by Mathers, summoned before Yeats mental images which he could not control: "My rituals were not to be made deliberately, like a poem, but all got by that method Mathers had explained to me, and with this hope I plunged without a clue into a labyrinth of images ..." (Yeats: 1956 : 255). This association proved to be a sustained attempt to explore questions about the relation of the noumenal to the phenomenal world that became central to his philosophical quest. Yeats was attracted to the ritual of initiation. The members were free to experiment, demonstrate and meditate upon its central symbol, "The Rose". Its doctrine emphasised the duty of the perfected soul to work for the regeneration of the world. Yeats made a spirited effort for the regeneration of Ireland. He explained:

I am convinced that in two or three generations it will become generally known that the mechanical theory has no reality, that the natural and the supernatural are knit together; that to escape a dangerous fanaticism we must study a new science; at that moment Europe may find something attractive in a Christ posed against a background not of Judaism but of Druidism; not shut off in dead history, but flowing, concrete and phenomenal.

I was born into this faith, have lived in it, and shall die in it; my Christ, a legitimate deduction from the Creed of St. Patrick, I think, is that 'Unity of Being' Dante compared to 'a perfect proportioned human body', Blake's Imagination, what the Upanishads have named

'Self.

(qtd. in Jeffares: 1964 : 262-263)

Shortly after Yeats's marriage in 1917, he discovered that his wife produced automatic writing. The obscure messages of the "Unknown Instructors" or the Spirits were gathered, given coherence and published. *A Vision* gives an idea of Yeats's view of history. It marks the culmination of the poet's life-long search for achieving the "Unity of Being".

Standish James O' Grady's reading of Gaelic literature and history inspired him to write a series of Irish history that helped to lay the foundations of the Irish literary revival. The two volumes of *The History of Ireland-the Heroic Period*, published in 1879 and 1880, give a narrative account of bardic times, concentrating upon the exploits of Cuchulain and the Red Branch Warriors. They introduced the young Irishmen to the ancient Irish mythology and to Elizabethan Ireland. The work had a tremendous influence on the Irish Renaissance. Yeats felt the need to emphasize the importance of the race after reading O' Grady. His view that "a day will come when Slieve-na-mon will be more famous than Olympus" (Yeats: 1961 : 512) greatly influenced the poet. He paid a tribute to O' Grady in the poem "Beautiful Lofty Things". O' Grady's influence was felt when Yeats turned away from foreign scenes to write *The Wanderings of Oisín* which was said to be "an Irish poem of some length" (Yeats: 1986 : 44).

Yeats regarded Katharine Tynan as one of the important people who had initiated the reformation of Irish poetry. Daughter of a substantial farmer, she was a poetess influenced by D.G. Rossetti, Adelaide Proctor and Longfellow. She was a fervent admirer of Parnell. Influenced by his sister Anna, she joined the Ladies' Land League. Later she regretted this venture into agrarian agitation. Tynan met Yeats when Oldham brought him to Clondalkin to discuss the plans for the *Dublin University Review*. Under the influence of O' Leary, they encouraged one another to take up Irish themes. Yeats advised Tynan: "... remember by being as Irish as you can, you will be the more original and true to yourself and in the long run more interesting even to English readers" (1986 : 35). It was Tynan who first suggested that Yeats should attempt a play on an Irish subject. Yeats's frequent correspondence with Tynan threw light on many aspects and convictions of his creative life. The poet asserted that it was necessary to develop "a school of Irish poetry founded on Irish myth and history" (1986 : 10-11) His "grievances against melancholy London" (92) was bitter : "London is always horrible to me" (231). In contrast was the "beautiful Island of Innisfree in Lough Gill Sligo: A little rocky Island with a legendary past" (119). It was "an old day dream" of Yeats to "go away and live alone on that Island" whenever he was in trouble. These feelings, recorded in the letters sent to Tynan, gave rise to the Innisfree poem.

Through O' Leary Yeats met Maud Gonne, a meeting which he later said "reverberated in his life like the sound of a Burmese

gong in the middle of a tent". (qtd. in Rajan : 1965 : 28). His initial wish: "Were we only white birds, my beloved, buoyed out on the foam of the seal" (Yeats: 1993 : 47), changed at a later date to another plea: "But O that I were young again/And held her in my arms!" (393). In between came the explosive question: "Why should I blame her that she filled my days/with misery...?" (101). Partly through Lucien Millevoeye's anti-British influence and partly due to her experience of evictions in Ireland, she had decided to devote herself to the movement for Irish independence. She cast herself in the role of an Irish Joan of Arc. Yeats sensed a potentially destructive conflict between violence and pity in her character, which he dramatized in his play, *The Countess Cathleen*. He was struck by her exquisite beauty, and the fact that moved him most was : "She is very Irish, a kind of 'Diana of the Crossways'" (1986 : 137). In a letter to Ellen O'Leary, he said, "Did I tell you how much I admire Miss Gonne? She will make many converts to her political belief. If she said the world was flat or the moon an old caubeen tossed up into the sky I would be proud to be her party" (1986 : 140).

Though she shared many of Yeats's ideals and pre-occupations, she instinctively preferred a man of action to a dreamer with poetic gifts. Yeats understood this fact and expressed his personal dilemma in *John Sherman*. *The Wisdom of the King* is also an allegorical version of his problem. The king places his wisdom at the feet of his lady-love in exchange of her heart. Overwhelmed by his greatness she half consents and yet half-refuses, for she longs to marry a warrior

who would carry her over a mountain in his arms. Yeats wrote for her *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*. Its political effect was evident in Stephen Gwynn's comment: "I went home asking myself if such plays should be produced unless one was prepared for people to go out to shoot and be shot" (qtd. in Jeffares: 1977 : 376). In Yeats's poetry Cathleen Ni Houlihan became a symbol of Ireland's nobility and passion, an image in which the Irish people could find consolation in their struggle for self identity :

Under a bitter black wind that blows from the left hand;
Our courage breaks like an old tree in a black wind and dies,
But we have hidden in our hearts the flame out of the eyes
Of Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan.

(Yeats: 1993 : 90)

Yeats's psychical beliefs and ideas of reincarnation suggested by A.E. greatly affected Maud Gonne. The poet initiated her into the Order of the Golden Dawn and planned to devote their lives to "mystic truth", but her marriage to Major John Mac Bride shattered him. Repeatedly he referred to his "lost love" in his poems: "The folly that man does/or must suffer, if he woos/A proud woman not indeed of his soul" (267). Yeats told Maud Gonne that he wished to be the Irish Victor Hugo. At her request, he wrote *The Countess Cathleen*, a play that depicted the suffering of the famine-stricken peasants who were tempted to sell their souls for food.

Yeats's experience in Ireland forced him to see that "the work of an Irish man of letters" was not only to awaken or preserve the

national idea among the mass of the people, but to convert the educated classes to it, and to fight for moderation, dignity and rights of the intellect upon the fellow nationalists: "Ireland is terribly demoralized in her things - in her scholarship, in her criticism, in her politics, in her social life. She will never be greatly better until she governs herself but she will be greatly worse until there arise protesting spirits", he lamented (1986 : 399). Catharine Rae and Emily Skeffington Thompson, both ardent Irish nationalists, had together founded the Southwark Junior Irish Literary Club to educate Irish children in national history and culture. Thompson's novel *Moy O'Brien* was a romantic story set against the political and social life of contemporary Ireland. Father Matthew Russell founded the *Irish Monthly*. Through it he hoped to foster national literature. Yeats was keen on a paper that would project Irish views. He wanted an Irish magazine that would act as the organ of their literary movement. He believed that "the true ambition is to make criticism as international, and literature as National, as possible" (1986 : 409). Another "protesting spirit" was Douglas Hyde. Under the pseudonym "An Caroibhin Aoibhinn" (The Pleasant Little Branch), he contributed poems in Irish, often outspokenly nationalist in sentiment to the *Irishman* and the *Shamrock*. He published bilingual editions of Irish verse and folklore, as well as histories of Gaelic literature but he always regretted the need to make translations from his Irish texts. The strong nationalist feeling from these men and women re-inforced Yeats's desire to harmonize nationalism and poetry.

A more congenial influence was that of Augusta Gregory. She was considered to be the living symbol of the old Irish Aristocracy. When Yeats met her she was already working "to add dignity to Ireland" (Coxhead: 1961 : 62). Her house at Coole Park was a second home for Yeats. He collaborated with her in the collection of old Irish legends and ballads. Later they founded the Irish National Stage, which emerged as the Abbey Theatre. Twelve years later when he received her son's letter informing him of her illness, he wrote without any inhibition: "She has been to me mother, friend, sister and brother. I cannot realize the world without her-she brought to my wavering thoughts steadfast nobility. All the day the thought of losing her is like a conflagration in the rafters. Friendship is all the house I have". (1956 : 477-478)

A leading figure in the Irish Revival, Lady Gregory helped to popularize Irish legends with her translations *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* and *Gods and Fighting Men*. She worked with Irish folklore in *Poets and Dreamers*, *A Book of Saints and Wonders* and *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland*. Her idiomatic style, often called "Kiltartanese" and knowledge of folklore were assets in her collaboration with Yeats on several plays. Yeats gathered folklore with her and this was regarded by both as an essential part of the Irish Renaissance. Her stance as a cultural nationalist culminated in her fight for the return to Ireland of the pictures collected by Sir Hugh Lane. To Yeats she was at once a patron, disciple and friend. He expressed his gratitude through poetry:

... because her hand
Had strength that could unbind
What none can understand,
And none can have and thrive
Youth's dreamy load, till she
So changed me that I live
Labouring in ecstasy.

(1993 : 139)

After Lady Gregory's death in 1932, Yeats wrote in the preface to *The King of the Great Clock Tower* :

A year ago I found I had written no verse for two years:
I had never been so long barren; I had nothing in my
head, and there used to be more than I could write.
Perhaps Coole Park, where I had escaped from politics,
from all that Dublin talked of, when it was shut, shut
me out of my theme; or did the subconscious drama
that was my imaginative life end with its owner?

(1934 : 18)

Yeats was strongly influenced by John Synge. Synge, with his "grave deep face", was felt to be a "rooted man" (1993 : 369). Yeats met Synge in Paris, in 1896, where Yeats had gone to make a ritual for an Order of Celtic Mysteries by which Young Ireland was to be initiated into a mystical philosophy. This ritual aimed to "combine the doctrines of Christianity with the faiths of a more ancient world, unite the perceptions of the spirit with those of natural beauty" (Hone: 1962 : 133). Yeats advised Synge, the poor and struggling student steeped in French literature, to go to the Aran Islands,

discover and express a life that had never found expression in literature. After his contact with the life of the peasantry, Synge changed from his brooding, melancholy self to the audacious, joyous, ironical man that one finds reflected in Yeats's "Last Poems". Both of them were "delighted in history and tradition" (1956 : 554). Synge's wish to bring together "ecstasy, asceticism and austerity" (346) affected Yeats. In retrospect, Yeats saw in Synge's career an image of his own journey. The long collaboration with Synge and Lady Gregory was celebrated by him:

We three alone in modern times had brought
Everything down to that sole test again,
Dream of the noble and the beggar-man.

(1993 : 368)

Synge studied the life of the Irish peasants in the island of Aran, off the Galway coast. Out of this study resulted *The Riders to the Sea* and *The Playboy of the Western World*. The second was considered by Yeats as the supreme work of Irish dialect theatre. Picturesque, poetical, fantastical, it caused a turbulence in Ireland. The riot, fomented by interested politicians brought into full play Yeats's fiery rhetoric. It accentuated his instinctive aversion to modern democracy as opposed to aristocracy. In his preface to *Poems and Translations* Yeats said that Synge "was but the more hated because he gave his country what it needed, an unmoved mind". Synge's decision to concentrate "upon a race/Passionate and simple like his heart" (Yeats: 1993 : 149) showed his belief that nationalism and art could be

harmonized. This had also been Yeats's tenet throughout his poetic career.

Among the friends who had "wrought/What joy is in my days" (Yeats: 1993 : 139), was Olivia Shakespear who appears in the *Memoirs* as "Diana Vernon". Yeats saw in her beauty "the nobility of defeated things". Her gentle, contemplative manner helped Yeats to confide to her his unrequited love for Maud Gonne. In 1938 he recalled: "For more than forty years she has been the centre of my life in London, and during that time we have never had a quarrel, sadness sometimes, but never a difference" (1972 : 325). If Maud Gonne offered Yeats subject matter for poetry and the "interesting" life he had hoped for, Augusta Gregory gave him time and place to work. In addition to these, Olivia Shakespear offered him "repose". Local disturbances were discussed through their regular correspondences. After the Treaty of December 1921, Yeats expressed his apprehension of a civil war between the extremists and those who had signed the treaty. He told her of his decision to abandon Thoor Ballylee under adverse condition (Hone: 1942 : 340). As a Senator of the Irish Free State, he joined the work of creating a new state with intense enthusiasm. He wrote to Mrs. Shakespear that all were like

... coral insects with some design in our heads of the ultimate island. Meanwhile the country is full of arms and explosives ready for any violent hand to use. Perhaps all our slow growing coral may be scattered but I think not - not unless Europe takes to war again

and starts new telepathic streams of violence and cruelty.

(qtd. in Jeffares: 1962 : 231)

His main interest was in the promotion of creative arts. At this time he nurtured plans for an Irish Academy of Letters. One of the objectives in founding this Academy in 1932 was to give the opinion of Irish authors more weight on different subjects like censorship. The graphic speech which Yeats had learned with Lady Gregory from the Galway peasants was deliberately drawn upon in the poems of "A Man Young and Old". Yeats admitted to Mrs. Shakespear that the use of their colourful style of speech was intentional. The fact that Yeats derived many of his themes and characters from the native soil was well known. He explained to Mrs. Shakespear that Cracked Mary, an old peasant woman who lived at Gort, was transformed to Crazy Jane, for he feared that her relatives would object to her outspoken comments on life :

Crazy Jane is more or less founded on an old woman who lives in a cottage near Gort. She loves her flower garden. She has just sent Lady Gregory some flowers in spite of the season and has amazing powers of acidulous speech - one of her queer performances is a description of how the meanness of a Gort shopkeeper's wife over the price of a glass of porter made her so despairing of the human race, she got drunk. The incidents of the drunkenness are of epic magnificence. She is the local satirist and a really terrible one.

(qtd. in Jeffares: 1962 : 256)

His reaction to general O' Duffy's Blueshirt Movement, his defence of the new Academy of Letters from volatile comments, and his interest in the education of the anarchic and violent young people of Ireland emerge from his letters to Olivia Shakespear. Man's ironic condition of impotent wisdom succeeding youth's ignorant passion is eloquently summed up in the poem written for Mrs. Shakespear:

Speech after long silence; it is right,
All other lovers being estranged or dead,
Unfriendly lamplight hid under its shade,
The curtains drawn upon unfriendly night,
Thus we descant and yet again descant
Upon the supreme theme of Art and song:
Bodily decrepitude is wisdom; young
We loved each other and were ignorant.

(Yeats: 1993 : 301)

Yeats's speech to the Irish Literary Society in 1925 affirmed the fact that in Gaelic literature there is "something that the English speaking countries have never possessed - a great folk literature". Moreover, the philosophy of Burke and Berkeley was strong enough to guide the nation. A re-examination of folk poetry brought him in close contact with Dorothy Wellesley. He set about to teach her his ideas regarding the peasant foundations of art. Feeling that his life was offering him no new material, he turned back to the ballads, Celtic mythology, Indian philosophy and Balzac. It has been suggested by Webster that Yeats's budding relationship with Wellesley was in part a re-evocation of his relationship with Lady Gregory (1974 : 156). He

tried to emulate her "natural" style. He, in fact, compared her to Lady Gregory: "With you it is not a question of the speech of the common people - as with Synge and Lady Gregory- but the common speech of people" (1964 : 45). Again, he developed the implicit comparison between the two women when he highlighted the quietness and tranquillity he had once found at Coole: "I long for your intellect and sanity. Hitherto I have never found these anywhere but at Coole". (1964 : 63). Yeats gradually saw that the man who loses himself completely is no more able to create than the man who remains completely detached. He sought a balance between self control and an acceptance of powerful inner forces. He told Dorothy Wellesley that great art is a struggle to keep something down, "violence or madness - 'down Hyterica passio'. All depends on the completeness of the holding down, on the stirring of the beast underneath" (1964 : 94).

The quest for the unknown was a distinct Celtic feature used by Yeats. Ezra Pound insisted on the presentation of something concrete, on accuracy, precision and economy of language. Yeats agreed to Pound's theory that a poet should substitute men for dreams. Pound helped him to steer away from abstractions and concentrate on the definite and the concrete. It was thus with a "new robustness" that Yeats created the poems dealing with the Lane Controversy. It was through Pound's reinforcement that Yeats's conviction of concentrating on real issues of Ireland hardened. Pound's effect upon his poetry was to add a vitality and mockery, to make it more harsh

and outspoken.

Three Indians reinforced Yeats's philosophy and sense of nationalism. Yeats's interest in Indian philosophy was combined with his active association with Theosophy and the Golden Dawn. Mohini Chatterjee, an associate of Madame Blavatsky, visited Dublin in 1886 and lectured to the Dublin Society. Yeats was impressed by his character and some of his ideas, especially his idea on rebirth. The query as to whether one should pray was answered thus: "No, one should say before sleeping: I have lived many lives, I have been a slave and a prince. Many a beloved has sat upon my knees and I have sat upon the knees of many a beloved. Everything that has been shall be again" (qtd. in Jeffares: 1984 : 07). This prose utterance was put into verse in "Kanva on Himself". The theory of re-incarnation was prevalent in Ireland. "Ephemera" and "Broken Dreams" made use of this idea. In the dedicatory poem to Mohini Chatterjee, Yeats affirmed : "Birth is heaped upon birth" (1993 : 280), and again, "Birth hour and death hour meet" (280). Chatterjee's philosophy confirmed the poet's "vague speculations and seemed at once logical and boundless" (Yeats : 1956 : 92). Jeffares suggests that "The Indian upon God" and "The Indian to his Love" were "inspired by the Brahmin Theosophist" (1984 : 07). Mohini Chaterjee "taught that everything we perceive, including so-called apparitions, exist in the external world; that this is a stream which flows on, out of human control; that we are noting but a mirror, and that deliverance consists in turning the mirror away so that it reflects nothing" (Hone: 1942:

Yeats met the Indian monk, Shri Purohit Swami, in London. He found the Swami a source of instruction and delight. He read the Monk's autobiography at Coole. Not only did Yeats write the introductions to Swami's books, but also collaborated in a translation of the *Upanishads* with him. Yeats referred to Indian wisdom and to the concept of the self as given in the *Upanishads*. He also mentioned the Indian conception of the Five Elements, the identity of the Soul and the Brahma. There is also an allusion to the final stage of Yoga when the soul is liberated from the bondage of action and becomes aware of its own identity.

Yeats met Tagore in 1912 and was deeply impressed by his personality and patriotic inclinations. They shared the same nationalist spirit. His introduction to the *Gitanjali* was duly acknowledged by the Indian poet. The Irish poet found the manifestation of his life-long dream in Tagore's *Gitanjali*. He wrote: "These lyrics - which are in the original, my Indian friends tell me, full of subtlety of rhythm, of untranslatable delicacies of colour, of metrical invention - display in their thought a world I have dreamed of all my life long" (Yeats: 1913 : 199 : IX).

In this way we have tried to trace a series of reference points in Yeats's life and show that life, as Imlac observed, "sets her gifts on the right hand and on the left Of the blessings set before you, make your choice and be content". After making his choice, Yeats

told his readers:

You that would judge me, do not judge alone
This book or that, come to this hallowed place
Where my friends' portraits hang and look thereon;
Ireland's history in their lineaments trace;
Think where man's glory most begins and ends,
And say my glory was I had such friends.

(1993 : 370)