

## THEME

Where I've found myself, there I belong,  
A needy offspring of this indigenous Earth.

(Tagore: *Powerlessness* : 1991 : 108. trans. mine)

The native land, independent or under suzerainty, is a source of inspiration, a focal issue in many poets. One can feel Tagore's adoration when he pleads,

Like a child I still cling to your bosom,  
My eyes on your face. Mother, hold me, please  
Within the firmest embrace of your arms  
Make me your own, one who belongs to your breast  
That secret source from where the fountain rises -  
Of your vast vitality and varied delights -  
Do take me there; don't keep me away.

(2003 : 93)

He wished to tread into a region "where the mind is without fear and the head is held high". India with her cornfields bent with the weight of the golden grains, various seasons, variety of flowers, network of rivers, mountains and charm, lives in the poems of Tagore. So does Ireland in the verse of Yeats. Her joy and anguish, restlessness and tranquillity, typicality and universality jostle in his poems. Derozio's poem "To India - My Native Land" speaks of the "beauteous halo" that had once circled India, and contrasts her predicament when she grovels in the "lowly dust". Yeats's verse similarly portrays Ireland, her past magnificence and topical situation.

In the initial phase Ireland formed a direct backdrop to many of the poems of Yeats. There is a division that can be made "between poems which draw upon the Celtic legends and those which owe their inspiration to localised memories of places" (Jeffares : 1962 : 76). Yeats said, "... from the moment when I began *The Wanderings of Oisín* ... my subject matter became Irish" (1993 : 523). He wrote to Katherine Tynan: "We should make poems on the familiar landscapes we love, not the strange and rare and glittering scenes we wonder at ..." (1986 : 119). The local setting became evident from the moment King Goll uttered,

I sat on cushioned otter - skin :  
My word was law from Ith to Emain,  
And shook at Inver Amergin  
The hearts of the world-troubling seamen.

(1993 : 17)

The fairy world that lured the "solemn-eyed" child from the world of human labour and pain was rooted solidly in the familiar Sligo scenery. Innisfree, the island in Lough Gill near Sligo, flashed upon the poet's mind when he saw a little ball dancing on a jet of water in a shop window. Walking through Fleet Street in London, very homesick, he remembered the lake water and this nostalgia that arose from the comparison of the "pavements grey" and the realm of solitude, gave rise to his vehement wish :

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree.

(1993 : 44)

Apart from the typical Irish locales that made his poems provide a distinct native feel, different aspects of Irish life were recorded. Much of the poet's childhood was spent in Sligo. The plains and the hills of the small, half-commercial town were touched with a peculiar sense of other-worldliness. In fact, the Celtic spirit was determined by the intensity of its faith in the irrational and other-worldly. Sligo and its belief that the supernatural lay very close to the border of the natural, affected Yeats deeply :

This is to me the loneliest place in the world.

Going for a walk is a continual meeting with ghosts ...

(1986 : 41)

In the "Reveries over Childhood and Youth", he referred to his growing interest in the supernatural. The servants spoke to the child about the fairies, and he shared their belief that the fairies undertook various activities like tying four knots on a "red flag with the Union Jack in the corner" and whispering to human beings. They convinced him that he had seen "whether once or many times I do not know, a supernatural bird in the corner of the room" (1956 : 12).

Premonitions were commonly accepted. On one occasion, Yeats screamed out of his sleep and "described the steamer's wreck", on board of which was his grandfather. The poet's autobiography mentioned the real ship-wreck and how his grandfather "saved himself and some others by swimming" (1956 : 13).

Through the Middletons Yeats developed a keener fascination

for the supernatural. At George Middleton's house he heard mysterious sounds. The "three loud raps" at sundown was believed to be the "accustomed signal" of "some dead smuggler" (1956 : 15). Strange lights were seen, moving over the river and over the slope of Knocknarea, reaching the peak in a few minutes. Mary Battle, his uncle's second sighted servant, described supernatural men and women riding the mountains with their dangling swords. Yeats associated them with powers of final destruction. Combining the mythological, personal and political ideas in successive sections, Yeats used the idea of the horsemen in the refrain of "Three Songs to the One Burden": "From mountain to mountain ride the fierce horsemen" (1993 : 371).

The belief in apparition was prevalent :

They say that on your barren mountain ridge  
You have measured out the road that the soul treads  
When it has vanished from our natural eyes;  
That you have talked with apparitions.

(1993 : 162)

The ghosts or "thevshi" lived in a state intermediary between this life and the next. His conviction was so strong that he said,

*Some there are, for I avow  
Such devilish things exist.*

(1993 : 238)

He wanted a "strong ghost" with a "sword in fist" to stand at the head

of the bed so that his son, Michael, could sleep soundly.

A common belief in the efficacy of magic was utilised by Yeats in *The Shadowy Waters*, where the second sailor opined "there is magic in his harp", for when he played it

Strange creatures, flutter up before one's eyes  
Or cry about one's ears.

(1993 : 474)

Superstitions associated with the supernatural were incorporated. The left-hand side was considered unlucky in Ireland. Therefore, the "bitter black wind" that blew from the left hand side ominously broke into two parts "the old brown thorn-trees" which were planted high over "Cummen Strand" (1993 : 90). The gods were driven "out of their liss" (77). Irish "lios" signified a mound inhabited or frequented by the supernatural entities and thus considered auspicious in Ireland. There was the belief that after death men live their lives "backward for a certain number of years" (Yeats : 1956 : 378). It was associated with "The Cold Heaven". The superstitious figures of Robert Artisson, the notorious devil, was used in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen". He was the incubus whom the opprobrious witch Lady Alice Kyteler loved. For this infatuation she had to pay with her life in 1374 before the Inquisition. Yeats's note on "that insolent fiend" was recorded :

The country people see at times certain apparitions  
whom they name now 'fallen angles', now 'ancient

inhabitants of the country', and describe as riding at  
whiles 'with flowers upon the heads of the horses'. I  
have assumed in the sixth poem that these horsemen,  
now that the times worsen, give way to worse. My last  
symbol, Robert Artisson, was an evil spirit much run  
after in Kil Kenny at the start of the fourteenth century.  
Are not those who travel in the whirling dust also in the  
Platonic Year?

(1993 : 534 - 5)

Yeats had come across the belief of the ancient Irish in the  
doctrine of rebirth in Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), Rhy's  
*Celtic Heathendom* (1888), Hyde's *Literary History of Ireland* (1899)  
and the English translation of Arbois de Jubainville's *The Irish  
Mythological Cycle and Celtic Mythology* (1903). The faith in rebirth  
appeared as a superstition in "On Woman" :

The Pestle of the moon  
That pounds up all anew  
Bring me to birth again -  
To find what once I had  
And know what once I have known.

(1993 : 165)

The influence of the supernatural upon Yeats's life and work  
was unique: "... precisely that of the moon upon the tide. At times its  
strong pull draws him out towards mystic depths; then the influence  
waned, and an earthly counter pull brings him, as it brought Oisín,  
back to the shores on which the frail tents are pitched" (Kinahan:  
1988 : 63).

Local customs entered Yeats's verse. At Ballisadare and Kilvernet there was a queer practice : " ... when anyone died/Came keeners hoarser than rooks" (1993 : 24).

"Keeners", from Irish "caoinim" or "I wail", were professional mourners who uttered loud lamentations for the departed souls. They were common sights in the funerals of the Irish. Father O' Hart "bade them give over their keening". When he died at the age of ninety-four, the custom prevailed :

There was no human keening  
The birds from Knocknarea  
And the world round Knocknashee  
Came keening in that day.

(1993 : 24)

Heavy hearted, the young and old birds came "keening in from Tiraragh", a town land in the parish of Kilmorgan, Sligo, "from Ballinafad", a village in the parish of Aughanagh, on the Sligo road near Boyle, and "from Inishmurray", an island in the Atlantic, off the Sligo coast near Streedagh Point, named after St. Muireadhach, Bishop of Killala. The birds participated in the keening but "nor stayed for bite or sup" and in this way "were all reproved/Who dig old customs up" (1993 : 25).

The traditional horse races, held annually at Galway, in the west of Ireland, with "the riders upon the galloping horses" and "the crowd that closes in behind", delighted the poet, and this delight that

"makes all of the one mind" was recorded in "At Galway Races".

"To Ireland in the Coming Times" began as an answer to an allegation that Yeats was turning away from Ireland's battle for freedom and concentrating on an imaginary world of visions. It defended his patriotism. He declared that his vision was of that which gave "meaning to the soul of Ireland and therefore to the battle itself" (Stock: 1961 : 43).

A substantial body of Yeats's verse centres upon his love for the fervent Irish nationalist Maud Gonne. Maud Gonne even appears in the verse plays of Yeats like the *Countess Cathleen*. He wrote *Deirdre of the Sorrows* keeping Maud Gonne in mind. While strolling on the cliffs at Howth the two sea gulls flying out to sea captured their attention and Maud Gonne's remark that if she was to have the choice of being any bird she would choose to be a seagull, became the theme in one of Yeats's early lyrics: "I would that we were, my beloved, white birds on the/foam of the sea" (Yeats: 1993 : 46). The poet's concern over the lady's fanatic devotion to politics gave rise to 'The Two Trees'. His depressed spirit is evident in the poems that centre on Maud Gonne's refusal and subsequent marriage. Old memories revive in many poems:

I loved long and long,  
And grew to be out of fashion  
Like an old song.

(1993 : 93)

He suggests "never give the heart outright" for he "gave all his heart and lost" (87). The lady, defeated by an unhappy marriage and deserted by the crowd, becomes the theme in "Fallen Majesty". The bronze painted plaster bust of Mand Gonne by Lawrence Campbell in the Dublin Municipal gallery inspired Yeats to write "The Bronze Head", a poem that reflects upon the change wrought by old age on the grand, imperious face.

As he matured, he used not only Ireland as a subject matter for his poetry, but also paid his attention to the contemporary problems and conflicts and used them as themes for his verse. Native issues gained prominence.

"Mad Ireland hurt you into poetry", exclaimed W.H. Auden in his elegy "From In Memory of W.B. Yeats". The wrongs that he saw in Ireland aggrieved the poet, and provoked him to serve his country in the only way that he could. That was by reviving its art and literature, and by voicing his comments upon contemporary events through his poems.

Initially Yeats strove to create a "romantic Ireland". He fought against the idea of Ireland as projected by Thomas Davis. The poet said, "His Ireland was artificial, an idea built up in a couple of generations by a few common place men" (1956 : 472). Within a short time he lamented,

Romantic Ireland's dead and gone

It's with O' Leary in the grave.

(1993 : 121)

O' Leary belonged to Yeats's romantic conception of Irish nationality. His funeral signified an end of an important era in Irish history. Yeats could not bring himself to attend it for he was repulsed and shrank from the idea of seeing around O' Leary's grave "so many whose nationalism was different from anything he had taught or that I could share" (Yeats : 1961 : 246). He cried fervently,

Was it for this the wild geese spread  
The grey wings upon every tide;  
For this that all that blood was shed,  
For this Edward Fitzgerald died,  
And Robert Emmet and Wolfe Tone,  
All the delirium of the brave?

(1993 : 121)

References to the "wild geese" or the Irish brigade that served in the armies of France, Spain and Austria, Fitzgerald, Emmet and Tone added topicality to the poem. The poet contrasted them with the new Catholic middle class people of Ireland who would not understand the love these men had for Ireland. Yeats felt that he was bound to these martyrs by his love for Ireland.

The first of the three public controversies that created a great upheaval in Ireland and influenced the poetic career of Yeats was the Parnell controversy. Charles Stewart Parnell had been "the national leader of his dreams" (Stock : 1961 : 214). He held himself accountable

only to his own spirit and appeared to be indifferent to the adulation of his Irish followers and the enmity exhibited by the House of Commons. His manoeuvring had almost resulted in an agrarian upheaval in Ireland. Unfortunately, the people of Ireland turned against him, not for the insurrection, nor for what he had failed to do for them, but as he became entangled in the divorce of Katherine O' Shea. He was cited as co-respondent in the case. He was repudiated by Gladstone, the Irish Hierarchy and the Irish Party. The priests raised the cry and the people responded with a moral uproar and uncontrollable indignation. Yeats's view of the deposition of Parnell was expressed in *Modern Ireland*. The blind causticity with which the authentic benefactors of Ireland have been greeted by posterity formed the focus in "To A Shade". Yeats composed "Mourn and then Onward" at the death of the Irish nationalist. This was published in the *United Ireland* journal in 1891. "Parnell's Funeral" traced the "popular rage" (Yeats : 1993 : 314). The poet bitterly accused the Irish : "Hysterica passio dragged this quarry down". He admitted,

None shared our guilt; nor did we play a part  
Upon a painted stage when we devoured his heart.

(319)

In the past, great Irish patriots like Emmet, Fitzgerald and Wolfe Tone had been murdered by "strangers". The Irishmen were not responsible; they merely stood as passive spectators, staring at the drama being enacted before them. In contrast, Parnell's fall was directly engineered by his own people. Their fury and intolerance

brought ignominy to the politician and patriot. The poet had his own share in the general guilt for failing to celebrate the martyrdom of the heroic personality. Nothing could be more degrading to the poet's soul than this guilt.

Yeats applied the idea of the ritual that the followers of the sacrificed would imbibe his spirit and energy. If De Valera had absorbed Parnell's noble spirit, he would not have countenanced political sophistry and rhetoric or the bitter partisan spirit which had divided the country into factions or warring camps. Had Cosgrave drawn inspiration from Parnell, the government of the country would have been placed in competent hands in order to satisfy the expectations of the people, or to prevent the perpetration of heinous murders like that of O' Higgins, the only able statesman in those troubled times. Passing on to O' Duffy, the poet suddenly stopped, for he remembered that the inept politicians were innumerable: "Their school a crowd" (320). The poet concluded by drawing a contrast between the politicians who learn their art in the crowd, and Parnell who built his noble ideals in solitude. He drew his lesson from Swift, the lonely, embittered soul and enriched his heart from the "bitter wisdom" of that proud man who lived in isolation, far from the fickle multitude. Yeats sought to glorify Parnell as the norm of political sagacity needed to rein the demagoguery and mob instinct of the times.

Yeats was deeply involved in the establishment of a national

theatre in Ireland. The work of the Abbey Theatre, "theatre business, management of men" (Yeats : 1993 : 104), engaged him so much that Arthur Symons commented : " ... he is now lost to lyrical poetry" (Jeffares: 1962 : 147). Yeats himself admitted that many things had kept him away from his "craft of verse" :

One time it was a woman's face, or worse -  
The seeming needs of my fool-driven land.

(1993 : 109)

At one time "Players and painted stage took all my love" (392).

Lady Gregory, Synge and Yeats were the three directors of the Abbey Theatre that opened in December 1904. Their work was a "deliberate attempt by three people to create an Irish literature by going back to the very sources of literature : myth, folklore and primitive speech" (O' Connor : 1939 : 51).

In 1907, violent protests and controversies arose with the production of Synge's play, *The Playboy of the Western World*. The story of the young man who wins the sympathy of the country people and of the publican's daughter by telling imaginary stories that he has murdered his father, was condemned by the audience. They looked upon it as Unionist propaganda to ridicule the west of Ireland people. The papers demanded an immediate withdrawal of the play. Yeats organised a meeting at the Abbey Theatre to explain the nuances of the play so that he could quieten the adverse critics. *Samhain*, the organ of the Irish Literary Theatre published his view that the common

people did not like sentimental writings but wanted to learn the truth about life. Yeats believed that Synge had intended to present this truth. The poet's bitterness over the episode was evident in the sardonic tone he adopted in the poem "On those That Hated 'The Playboy of the Western World', 1907". He expressed his exasperation at the audience who rioted over Synge's play and in which Mac Bride's partisans hissed at Maud Gonne by contemptuously dismissing them as a horde of knaves and dolts (103). "At the Abbey Theatre" was the poet's indictment of the fickle-minded Irish spectators who had no settled taste to appreciate his romantic plays or the realistic plays of Synge :

Is there a bridle for this Proteus  
That turns and changes like his draughty seas?  
Or is there none, most popular of men,  
But when they mock us, that we mock again.

(1993 : 107)

He lamented the degeneration of the national movement into a cry for democratic equality. On one hand was his passion for the aristocracy, and on the other was his hatred for the unworthy audience :

The weak lay hands on what the strong has done,  
Till that be tumbled that was lifted high  
And discord follow upon unison,  
And all things at one common level lie.

(1993 : 107 - 8)

The raging dispute over Synge's play disillusioned Yeats. His plans for shaping a new cultural outlook in Ireland were threatened and he felt that "there could be no appreciation of art and literature in 'this blind bitter land' twisted and strained by the hatred of politics" (Jeffares: 1962 : 155).

Another important public event that disturbed Yeats was the Lane Controversy. It began when Hugh Lane, founder of the Dublin Municipal Gallery and Lady Gregory's nephew, offered his invaluable collection of thirty nine, mainly impressionist, French paintings to the Dublin Corporation. He provided a moral boost to build a suitable permanent gallery for housing them. He expressed his inclination towards the design made by Sir Edward Lutyens. It was that of a bridge gallery spanning the river Liffy. The design was not sanctioned, for the people disapproved the lineage of the designer. William Martin Murphy, proprietor of the *Independent* newspaper and a prominent anti-Parnellite, was the staunchest critic. An attempt was made to raise the adequate amount through subscription, but it did not prove fruitful. Angered and frustrated, Lane gave the pictures to the National Gallery in 1913. Later he added a codicil under which the pictures could be returned to Dublin on condition that they would be suitably put up within five years of his death. The codicil was not witnessed. Before he could do anything further, he was drowned when the "Lusitania" was sunk off Ireland by a German submarine in 1915. The London National Gallery refused to part with the pictures.

Yeats felt that the meanness of a particular segment of Irish people was reflected in this controversy. The poet's idea, as expressed in his notes on "Responsibilities", was clear :

These controversies, political, literary and artistic, have showed that neither religion nor politics can of itself create minds with enough receptivity to become wise, or just and generous enough to make a nation.

(1993 : 530)

He was shocked at the baseness of the new middle class, the men with "minds without culture" (530). A series of poems voiced his feelings. "To a Wealthy Man Who Promised a Second Subscription to the Dublin Municipal Gallery if it were proved the People Wanted Pictures" came as the poet's reply to a rich aristocrat, probably Ardilaun, who had argued that before any contribution was made, the wishes of the people, contemptuously referred to by Yeats as the "Paudeen" and "Bidly" (119), must be taken into account. Yeats counter argued that art has always been fostered by enlightened people who never consulted the populace regarding the need of investing large sums of money for the cultivation of art. To lend credence to his theory, he cited examples of Italian Renaissance aristocrats. Duke Ercole de L' Este of Ferrara arranged the staging of five plays by Plautus on the occasion of his son's marriage in 1502. Guidobaldo di Montefeltro, the Duke of Urbino, built a palace and made it a "grammar school of courtesies" (120) by storing it with treasures of art and priceless books. Cosimo de Medici engaged

Michelozzo de Bartolomoo, an architect, to plan the library of St. Mark's at Florence. Later it was enriched by the frescoes of Fra Angelico. The rich man, Yeats believed, should give out of his own generosity, leaving the common people at their petty game of "pitch and toss". Such generous support to art shall one day build up a new aristocracy, symbolised by the eagle.

"September 1913" was built upon the contrast between the heroism of O' Leary and contemporary political agitators. It lashed at the opponents and detractors of the Lane pictures, headed by Murphy. The heroism of O' Leary and other Irish patriots moulded by the spirit of the highest heroic ideals of romantic Ireland was placed on one side. On the other side were the mean politicians, engaged in petty gains. They prayed for God's favour to realise their base, selfish aspirations. Irish patriots had gone on missions in order to subvert foreign rule, had sacrificed their lives without the least hesitation or regret. This "delirium of the brave" had no meaning to the political workers who would not hesitate to either cast aspersion upon their illustrious deed or associate some ulterior motive with their action.

Lane's rare collection would have given "children's children loftier thought / Sweeter emotion, working in their veins / Like gentle blood (1993: 123). The people, misunderstanding his intentions, heaped insult upon him "for his pains" and for his "open handedness", he received disgrace (123).

The time when Yeats saw all his "priceless things" were "but a post the passing dogs defile" (1993 : 143), it was a rude jolt to his idea of nationalism. In the midst of the common political agitators of the time, he found two roads to tread on. The first was to voice his bitter denunciation at the wrongs he saw before him, and the second was to constantly appeal to the conscience of the Irishmen, to make them remember "thy day of glory past" (Derozio : 1).

The Easter Rising of 1916 changed Yeats's perspective. "September 1913" had dwelt upon the sacrifice of the brave and the emotional who gave their lives for a national cause. It was a sneering outburst against the hucksters who "fumble in a greasy till" (120). The Irish revolt against the English in 1916 showed that Yeats had nurtured an attitude of complacent detachment towards his fellow Irishmen :

Being certain that they and I  
But lived where motley is worn.

(1993 : 203)

The multitude suddenly performed a heroic deed and completely transformed themselves into figures of breath-taking nobility. It seemed as though Ireland, swept by the revolution, had "changed utterly". Among the political poems composed during the insurgency, "Easter 1916" is significant because it came as a tribute to the heroic martyrdom of the Irish nationalists in the face of almost certain defeat. The event was taken as an example of nationalist heroism in the face

of tremendous odds. A few hundred men took part in the insurrection, led by Patrick Pearse, Thomas Mac Donagh and James Connolly. They captured several strategic points of Dublin and proclaimed the establishment of an Irish Republic with a provisional government. Their forces were defeated within a week and sixteen leaders were shot. Yeats's poem expressed a mixed mood. A sense of surprise, a dash of doubt regarding the propriety of the daring deed mingled with the final emotion of admiration for the magnanimous heroism of the otherwise common men. The refrain "All changed, changed utterly/ A terrible beauty is born" (203) charged at the focal issue, the nobility of the action emerging from the tragic circumstances, the violent and reckless, almost fanatic patriotic fervour which culminated in the martyrdom. Constance Markiewicz, nee Gorebooth, the girl Yeats had known in Sligo, was an excellent horse-rider. She was thrown into prison as a result of nationalist activities. In "On a Political Prisoner" Yeats commemorated her activities. Patrick Pearse, the Commandant General and President of the provisional government during the Easter week, surrendered and was shot by the British. Thomas Mac Donagh, the poet and critic, met the same fate. Even "a drunken, vainglorious lout" (203) like John Mac Bride, Maud Gonne's husband, rose to the occasion and attained a tragic dignity through his part in the Easter Rising. All these individuals resigned their parts in the "casual comedy" of life and were driven by "one purpose alone", obsessed "to trouble the living stream".

Yeats remembered that the sole and steadfast concentration

on one single purpose could prove detrimental:

Too long a sacrifice  
Can make a stone of the heart.

(1993 : 204)

Hastily he dismissed the idea with the remark that only God can judge and evaluate human motive and action. The poet's duty was to list them, for their death had been brought about by a heroic dream, the dream of liberation. They might have been misguided by their patriotic zeal. The British Government was committed to the granting of Home Rule in Ireland. They may have kept their promise. In that case, the death would have been unnecessary. "Easter 1916" showed that the poet was "deeply troubled by the knowledge that heroic action can have more than one implication" (Rajan : 1965 : 78).

Did that play of mine send out  
Certain men the English shot?

(Yeats: 1993 : 393)

These lines may be viewed as the poet's query regarding the effect of his play *Cathleen ni Houlihan* upon the Irish turbulence of Easter 1916 or upon the sixteen dead men.

In "Sixteen Dead Men" Yeats referred to the consequences of the uprising that had seemed so heroic. When the British officers shot down sixteen men who had taken part in the rebellion, there was a bitter ferment in Ireland. Yeats placed the "new comrades" by the side of the other heroes of the Irish national movement. He felt

that Edward Fitzgerald and Wolfe Tone "both born in 1763, both captured by the British, both accused of treason, both dead in prison in 1798, would have much to discuss with the sixteen newly dead" (Unterecker: 1969 : 162).

The poet imagined a situation where two leaders of the Easter Rising, Pearse and Connolly, discussed the only means by which they could keep alive their land's vitality. In the midst of disturbances and turbulence :

There's nothing but our own red blood  
Can make a right Rose Tree.

(1993 : 206)

The Easter Rising affected Yeats in such a way that even in the last phase of his poetic career, he remembered one of the heroes in his "Last Poems". O' Rahilly was a handsome young man from County Kerry in the south-west Ireland. He was shot in the 1916 Rising in Henry Street, beside the General Post Office. Yeats wrote :

Sing of the O' Rahilly,  
Do not deny his right;  
Sing a 'the' before his name;

(1993 : 354)

"The" was "a hereditary title in England" (Jeffares : 1984 : 389).

The topical disturbances, a crucial theme in the middle period of the poet's career, were merged with the contemporary events abroad.

The deepening disintegration all around formed another key thread in Yeats's poetry :

Things fall apart, the centre cannot hold,  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and every where  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned.

(1993 : 211)

The universal chaos was not only social and political, but also moral and cultural. The degradation was so penetrating that the poet felt :

The best lack all conviction while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.       (211)

The poem is an expression of the fear that appalled sensitive people at the sight of bloodshed and strife. Ellmann dates this poem January 1919 (1954 : 290) although it was published in November 1920. Manuscripts in Mrs. Yeats's possession showed how large a part the world situation of 1918 - 19 played in its conception and growth. There were "six small, loose-leaf sheets of preliminary manuscript working, and two fair copies, the earlier of which Yeats tore and committed to his waste paper basket : from this Yeats recovered it" (Stallworthy: 1963 : 17).

The poem opens in the midst of a vision, where the poet sees a widening gyre. As the controller of the gyre is unable to control its movement, the falcon cannot be guided by the master. The lack of

co-ordination results in all-round convulsion in which the finer values of life perish. The anarchic vision is a premonition :

Surely some revelation is at hand;

Surely the Second Coming is at hand.

(Yeats: 1993 : 211)

"Hardly are those words out" when he can see a "vast image" coming out of "Spiritus Mundi", or a general storehouse of images which has ceased to be the property of any single personality or spirit. The sphinx-like being, having "a shape with lion body and the head of a man", and "a gaze blank and pitiless as the sun", moves slowly, in an ungainly, lounging gait towards "Bethlehem to be born". It appears as though it has come to undo all that has been done till that moment.

Yeats's conviction that the Christian civilization was nearing the end of its allotted span of two thousand years and a new phase, antithetical in nature, was about to begin, gave rise to the poem. This belief arose out of the disintegration of Europe, of which the First World War and the political upheavals in Ireland were the symptoms.

Some of the poems of the middle phase were occasioned by the troubled times of the Irish Civil War (1922-23) between the new Irish Free State Government and the Republicans, led by Eamonn de Valera, who refused to accept the terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty. It posed a potent threat to the noble-houses of Ireland including the

Thoor Ballylee Tower. "Meditations in Time of Civil War" opens with a reference to the ancestral houses of the noble families which were on the verge of destruction along with the values they symbolized. These houses were symbols of the spontaneous, over-flowing life. Like rainy-clouds they had showered life all around, but with the changing time they have become "mere dreams" (225). The final section creates a nightmare, a hectic scene of battle, slaughter and vengeance. "Monstrous familiar images" of the "rage-driven, rage-tormented, and rage-hungry troop" that cry out for vengeance "swim to the mind's eye" (231).

"Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" arose out of "some horrors at Gort, Co. Galway during the period when fighting between the Irish Republican Army (the IRA) and the English Army and Royal Irish Constabulary (the RIC) increased" (Jeffares : 1984 : 229). The poem is thematically connected with "The Second Coming" and "Meditations in Times of Civil War". It was the time when the growing fury of the British mercenary soldiers, The Black and Tans, had brought home to Yeats the barbarousness that was about to annihilate all artistic treasures and the essential values of life. The vivid description of the horror let loose by the British mercenaries upon the people of Ireland is an example of how Yeats used native issues to form the fabric of his poems:

Now days are dragon-ridden, the nightmare  
Rides upon sleep : a drunken soldiery  
Can leave the mother, murdered at her door,

To crawl in her own blood and go scot - free.

(1993 : 233)

The climax is to be found in the final section which conjures up the apocalyptic vision of a civilization being trodden by the brutal forces of darkness. The most vivid and compelling embodiment of the poet's strong reaction to the wanton savagery of his times is found when he says, "All break, and vanish, and evil gathers head" (1993 : 237).

In the midst of the degeneration Yeats composed a prayer for his daughter. On another level of interpretation, it is a prayer for the world at large. As the tempestuous sea-wind battered upon the tower, the arches of the bridge, and the elms, the poet becomes deeply anxious for the welfare of his innocent, sleeping child. Personal, national and international elements merge.

The violence and confusion prevailing at a critical time in human history were taken up again in the "Last Poems", but the poet's response was different. "The Gyres" expresses the conviction that the life gyre of the present civilization has reached the highest point of its expansion and its collapse is near at hand. Instead of being stunned or terrified by the impending catastrophe announced by the speedy destruction of the old values and ideals, the poet is exhilarated by it and offers it a joyful welcome.

The rhythm of the opening line has a jubilant throb : "The Gyres! The Gyres! Old Rocky Face, look forth". In this mood of elation the death and disappearance of old ideals are alluded to in the most

nonchalant tone, as if there were nothing unusual about them. Or, when their loss is temporary, one should waste no regret over them. Old ways, thoughts and values are now outdated. Worthy things have fallen into neglect or sunk into oblivion. People who were the living embodiments of the ancient aristocratic culture, have departed from the world. Personal reminiscences come up when the poet reflects, "... beauty dies of beauty, worth of worth" (337). The world is now submerged in the tide of wanton violence, cruelty and bloodshed. It appears as though the discord of the Greek philosopher Empedocles has become rampant in the world. It seems that the old tragedy of Troy, death of Hector and the burning of the whole city, symbolic of the annihilation of a phase of civilization, is going to repeat itself.

The poet-spectator, very unlike his previous self, watches the spectacle of the whole universe shattering into fragments. Filled with a peculiar delight, he rejoices. The tragic gaiety arises from a deeper understanding of the calamity. Through the phrase "numb nightmare" Yeats depicts the critical, external atmosphere of darkness; inhumanity and horror that prevail in the world. What is worse, is the staining of the sensitive body by its own components, the "blood and mire". Yeats recalls the beastliness in man which has now shaken his sensitivity, but dismisses regret at the withering of beauty, worth and decency. "What matter?", he asks casually. The vortex confronting man is a commonplace in history. Civilizations, greater and more vigorous, have passed away like the airy fabric of dreams. Their grandeur proved to be a simulacrum, like the paint of beauty on a hollow face. The poet had himself mourned before: "Many ingenious lovely things are gone" (232), but now he has become wiser. From

the "cavern" of prophecy issues the voice audible to the ear of his heart, that he should rejoice in the face of the universal tragedy. The aristocratic people, "lovers of horse and of women", so dear to him, shall resurface. There is affirmative capability in the belief that a new era will issue from the womb of the darkness that has swallowed the previous one. The life of the new antithetical gyre, according to the "system", shall commence. This is the essence of the tragic wisdom which comes to the poet to keep him rejoicing in the face of the dark night of chaos hovering over the world of insane brutality.

"The aristocrat, in the context of Yeats's verse, is the embodiment of human passion ... a symbol of human perfection" (Loftus: 1964 : 57). The significant people of Yeats's world, who had stamped their impression upon Irish history and thought were the landlords in the aristocratic houses. The country houses of Sligo, Lissadell, Hazelwood and the more rarely seen towers of Markee, had appealed to Yeats. They symbolized a life set amid natural beauty. Lissadell was a place of haunting beauty lying "near the point of Sligo Bay, between the heather - covered mountains and the great waves of the Atlantic" (Roper : 1929 : 5). The two Gore-Booth sisters, the inhabitants of Lissadell, were highly esteemed by Yeats : "Your sister and yourself, two beautiful figures among the great trees of Lissadell, are among the dear memories of my youth" (ed. D.E.S. Maxwell & S.B. Bushrui : 1965 : 69). The elder sister, Constance, identified herself with the Trade Union Movement,

participated as the second-in-command of the Citizen Army Force. was court-martialled and sentenced to death, but later reprieved and sent to prison. Eva, the younger sister, was absorbed in Irish history and mythology, worked for the Women's Suffrage Movement and became a public speaker on political and economic subjects.

Two girls in silk kimonos, both  
Beautiful, one a gazelle.

(Yeats : 1993 : 263)

More important was Lady Gregory's house at Coole Park near Gort in County Galway. Yeats explained in "The Green Helmet and other poems" (1910) : "This house had enriched my soul out of measure because here life moves with restraint through gracious forms. Here there has been no compelled labour, no poverty-thwarted impulse" (qtd. in Jeffares: 1984 : 93). The Gregory house with its seven woods provided a harbour for the poet during many summers, and had a strong hold on his emotions and imagination. Yeats's description of the house and park is recorded by Joseph Hone, who concludes : "At Coole Yeats found a life of order and of labour where all outward things were the signature of an inward life" (140). "Coole Park, 1929" deals with the avenue of great trees, the landscape of mysterious beauty. Lady Gregory dominates the poem as she dominated Coole. Gregory, "whose epitaph in fact the poem is", forms "the compass point at the centre of the circle" (Stallworthy: 1963 : 198) that also encompassed Hyde, Synge, John Shaw-Taylor and Lane. Lady Gregory's Coole Park was a "household where/Honour

had lived so long" (Yeats: 1993 : 369). When Yeats first visited it in 1896, he was still "childless" and mused that his "Children may find here/Deep rooted things". He "never foresaw its end", he says in "The Municipal Gallery Revisited", but in "Coole Park 1929" he had prophesied the end of the house :

When all those rooms and passages are gone,  
When nettles wave upon a shapeless mound  
And saplings root among the broken stone ...

(1993 : 274)

Lady Gregory was the "last inheritor" of Coole Park. The Wyndham Land Purchase Act was a turning point in Irish history. The large estates were fragmented. The Gregory House at Coole met a similar fate. It was divided, sold to the Department of Forestry and then to a contractor who demolished it in 1942. Yeats lamented its disintegration and wondered,

Could my spoken words have checked  
That whereby a house lay wrecked?

(1993 : 393)

The Islandmore Castle was built at Thoor Ballylee by the de Burgo family in 1585 and passed on to Edward Ulick de Burgo. This Norman tower was purchased by Yeats in 1917, and treated as a safe anchorage in the midst of contemporary turbulence :

Blessed be this place  
More blessed still this tower.

(Yeats : 1993 : 267)

It forms the backdrop in many key poems like "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory", "The Phases of the Moon", and "A Prayer on going into my House". In "The Black Tower" the poet treats Thoor Ballylee as a microcosm of Ireland.

Yeats wrote to Lady Gregory on February 22, 1918 : "I am trying a poem in manner like one that Spenser wrote for Sir Philip Sidney" (ed. Wade: 1954 : 646). On March 19 he wrote : "I have today finished my poem about Robert, a pastoral, modelled on what Virgil wrote for some friend of his and on what Spenser wrote of Sidney" (Wade: 647). The poem "Shepherd and Goatherd" became "nearer to Astrophel in general spirit" (Jeffares: 1984 : 146). The son of Lady Gregory, a symbol of the old world of chivalry, becomes the theme in a few poems. In the poem "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory" a situation is welléd up where the poet finds himself with his wife settled comfortably in his tower. He ruminates over the tragic death of the young aviator and moves on to the deaths of other dear friends : Lionel Johnson, the classical scholar and soul of courtesy; John Synge, the man who "dying chose the living world' for theme"; Old George Pollexfen who in his "muscular youth" was noted for his horsemanship and love of pure-bred horses. The death of his "dear friend's dear son" rakes up his old wounds. The meditation takes a turn when the poet contemplates on one glorious moment of a crowded life, and sets it against an age without a name. The final statement comes directly from the heart : "a thought / of that late death took all my heart for speech" (Yeats : 1993 : 152).

Balanced against the delight of flying through the "tumult in the clouds", the past and future become meaningless to the Irish airman. In that moment of intensity he can face the approaching death heroically and conquer it. Major Gregory, impelled by a "lonely impulse of delight", had plunged into the whirlpool of the war. "An Irish Airman", who "foresees his death" is the "Soldier, scholar, horseman" who is applauded for "all he did, done perfectly" (151).

Major Gregory's memory also manifests itself in "Reprisals", a poem which brutally denounces the fearful atrocities committed by the Black and Tans.

Half-drunk or whole-mad soldiery  
Are murdering your tenants there  
Men that revere your father yet  
Are shot at on the open plain.  
Where may new-married women sit  
And suckle children now? Armed men  
May murder them in passing by  
Nor law nor parliament take heed.

(1957 : 79)

The period of the Black and Tans awoke Yeats's nationalist feeling and he viewed the upheavals in Ireland as the "microcosmic expression of conflagrations of macrocosmic proportions" (Henn : 1965 : 311).

The assassination of Kevin O' Higgins, Vice President and Minister of Justice in the Irish Free State, roused Yeats to compose

"Death" and "Blood and the Moon". A follower of the Anglo-Irish tradition, he was regarded by Yeats as "the finest intellect in Irish life" (1993 : 536). The poet praised his bold stand before the assassins:

A great man in his pride  
Confronting murderous men  
Casts derision upon  
Supersession of breath.

(1993 : 264)

His portrait along with that of Roger Casement, the patriot of doubtful political record but hallowed by his heroic death, and Arthur Griffith who had a brave and dignified stand in the jail and at the moment of his death, hung in the Municipal Gallery: "The Municipal Gallery Revisited" accommodates two anonymous pictures to complete the general structure of patriotism and religion, the two major shafts of Irish national life. The "revolutionary soldier kneeling to be blessed" and "An Abbot or Archbishop with an upraised hand/Blessing the Tricolour" (1993 : 368) are significant. They do not represent "the dead Ireland" of Yeats's youth, but the "terrible and gay" soul of Ireland which the poetic and artistic imagination has fixed permanently from the drift of time.

Yeats's wish to defend the Irish against the English was evident in his ballads on Roger Casement. He told Dorothy Wellesley : "I am fighting in those ballads for what I have been fighting all my life, it is our Irish fight ..." (1964 : 115). Casement who joined the Sinn Fein

Movement in 1914, was taken to be a degenerate from his diaries. Ample proof was collected by Dr. Maloney to prove that the diaries were forged. In his effort to make amends for the wrong conferred upon Casement, Yeats wrote:

Come speak your bit in public  
That some amends be made  
To this most gallant gentleman  
That is in quicklime laid.

(1993 : 352)

The poet alleged that "They turned a trick by forgery / And blackened his good name". It was their duty to

Draw round, beloved and bitter men  
Draw round and raise a shout"  
The ghost of Roger Casement  
Is beating on the door.

(1993 : 353)

Juxtaposed with the renowned figures associated with the literary and political scenario were the less known individuals, the peasants and the a-political men and women of Ireland. "The peasants were the enduring element. They are not often in the foreground of Yeats's thought as they are in J.M. Synge's, but their existence in the background makes a difference. They have long traditions and their way of thinking about religion, about history, and not least about the people in the big houses, has coloured the characteristic Irish outlook" (Stock: 1961 : 3). One finds the figures of the old fisherman in grey

Connemara clothes and the dead hunter mourned by the servants and hounds. There is Moll Magee who accidentally smothers her baby to death and is driven out by her husband to be jeered and sneered by others. There is the difficult domestic life of an Irish peasant woman who rises at dawn to "kneel and blow/Till the seed of the fire flicker and glow", and "scrub and bake and sweep/Till stars are beginning to blink and peep" (1993 : 67). The "dreary, droopy beggar/Without a friend on the earth", "blind from his birth", befriended by "a thieving rascally cur" (326) can be contrasted with the singing, dancing, Irish girl who is heard by only one man from among the crowd by the road or at an alehouse. (303-4). Old Tom the lunatic sings of Huddon, Duddon, Daniel O' Leary, Holy Joe and the beggar-man. They are all inhabitants found in the Irish country side and Yeats tried "by bare undecorated writing to bring to light the essential things in them, stripped clean" (Stock: 13). He was "always ransacking Ireland" (Yeats: 1986 : 463) for poetic themes and the common people of Ireland give a distinct touch to Yeats's verse. As the Irish Great House tradition, which represented a way of life converting chaos into order by custom and ceremony, had meaning for the poet, so did the peasants signify the order of understanding.

The frequent visits to friends and associates provided suitable subjects for poetry. The house designed by Francis Goodwin, built in the neoclassical manner, was celebrated in "In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markiewicz"; Coole Park was commemorated in many poems while his visit to Mabel Beardsley produced the seven sectioned

poem "Upon a dying lady".

Yeats's brief association with the Blue Shirt movement gave rise to "Three Songs to the Same Tune", but soon he was disillusioned with "the mob that howls at the door" (1993 : 327). The failure to achieve the dream of the "Unity of Culture" made him realise the hollowness of the people in general. Yet he always wanted to espouse a Unity of Being and his aim was "the development of national excellence by the best modern education available" (ed. Jeffares and Cross : 127). As a senator in the Irish Free State he said :

... begin geography with your native fields, arithmetic  
by counting the school chairs and measuring the walls,  
history with local monuments, religion with local saints,  
and then to pass on from that to the nation itself.

(ed. D.R. Pearce : 170 - 71)

This proposition corroborated his initial belief that national pride is generally deep-rooted in the tradition, culture and history of the nation itself. The changing situation in Ireland gave rise to "Whiggery" defined by Yeats as

A levelling, rancorous, rational sort of mind  
That never looked out of the eye of a saint  
Or out of drunkard's eye.

(1993 : 272)

Yet, in the midst of the changing scenario, Yeats tried to remind the Irish:

We are the people of Burke; we are the people of Grattan;  
we are the people of Swift, the people of Emmet, the  
people of Parnell.

(ed. D.R. Pearse : 99)

Yeats dreaded segregation from the Irish soil even after death, and expressed his wish to be buried "under bare Ben Bulbin's head". The idea of arranging his burial place may have been derived from William Pollexfen, his grandfather who superintended "the making of his tomb" (Yeats: 1956 : 67). Yeats's letter to Ethel Mannin expressed the poet's wish in explicit terms :

I am arranging my burial place. It will be in a little remote country churchyard in Sligo where my great grand father was clergyman a hundred years ago. Just my name and dates and these lines,

Cast a cold eye

On life, on death :

Horseman, pass by.

(1954 : 914)

"Under Ben Bulbin", regarded as Yeats's last will and Testament, is the address of a departing poet to the poets of the younger generation who will be called upon to continue the poetic tradition which he is transmitting to them. The poets of Ireland must learn their art sedulously and conscientiously, shun the distorted and degenerate style of poetry and sing, like the old Irish minstrel, of all classes of society, the peasantry and the aristocratic class. Their art should be national. Inspired by the tradition of heroic

Ireland they shall contribute to the survival of the indomitable spirit of the Irish people. Yeats, a product of the Irish soil, shall be buried at Dunruff Church and the words, dictated by him and inscribed upon his tomb of stone, shall act as a constant reminder to the Irish people.

As he remembered "all those renowned generations ... Defending Ireland's soul" (1993 : 377), he wished to be remembered as a descendant of the rich Irish heritage.

To conclude, we can say, Ireland was, as it were, the very spirit of Yeats as Yeats, on the other hand, was the spirit of Ireland. Hence, Yeats and Ireland and Ireland and Yeats are a unified whole.